

# Mothers of the Empire: Empresses Zoe and Theodora on a Byzantine Medallion Cycle

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*To the memory of my parents*

THREE DELICATE MEDALLIONS embedded in the famed Khakhuli Triptych portray exceptional imagery featuring Byzantine women.<sup>1</sup> The cloisonné enameled roundels show female figures dressed in imperial garments interacting with saints in scenes not paralleled exactly in other Byzantine works of art. The first medallion represents two empresses crowned or blessed by the Mother of God, a scene often referred to as double coronation; the second roundel shows an empress and an angel greeting each other; the third depicts an empress and John the Baptist exchanging salutations (figs. 1–3). These representations are unique in Byzantine art: no other images survive that show empresses by themselves interacting with John the Baptist or an angel, and no other example of the double coronation of two empresses is extant. Because of their exceptional imagery and overwhelming focus on female figures, the enamels deserve close scrutiny. The medallions, located on the insides of the wings of the triptych, are arranged symmetrically: two on the left and one on the right wing; a fourth medallion completing the set is a modern product.<sup>2</sup> Likely produced as a series, they contain no inscriptions. This is remarkable because Byzantine enamels are normally inscribed. Their irregular outlines and cramped compositions suggest that they may have included identifying inscriptions, which were deliberately removed when the roundels were inserted into the Khakhuli Triptych (fig. 4).<sup>3</sup>

The surviving three roundels form a cohesive and compositionally complete set, yet it is conceivable that other pieces not extant were included in the original series. The size of the medallions (ca. 5 cm × 4.4 cm) is not unusual and is similar to many enameled roundels produced in Byzantium in the tenth to twelfth centuries.<sup>4</sup> Enamel medallions of



Fig. 1. Enamel Medallion with Two Empresses Crowned by the Virgin Mary, Khakhuli Triptych, Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre.



Fig. 2. Enamel Medallion with Empress and Angel, Khakhuli Triptych, Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre.





Fig. 3. Enamel Medallion with Empress and John the Baptist, Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre.



Fig. 4. Khakhuli Triptych, © Georgian National Museum. Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts.

similar size were used as decoration for a variety of objects, including book covers, icon frames, reliquaries, votive crowns, and chalices. The numerous scrolls shown on the three roundels might suggest that the enamels originally decorated a book cover, yet this remains a hypothesis.

The Khakhuli Triptych served as the altar of the Georgian royal church at Gelati dedicated to the Virgin. The church was founded and begun by King Davit IV (r. 1089-25) and completed by his son, Demetre I (r. 1025-1154), as the burial church of the Bagratid Dynasty.<sup>5</sup> Although the dedicatory inscription of the triptych mentions both kings, there is no scholarly consensus on its exact dating.<sup>6</sup> The three medallions belong to a large array of Byzantine and Georgian enamels embellishing the triptych. Regrettably, it is unclear how the three roundels made their way to Georgia. The medallions and the other Byzantine enamels incorporated into the Khakhuli Triptych could have arrived in Georgia as diplomatic gifts, as argued by Titos Papamastorakis. Yet, it is also possible that at least some of the enamels were purchased in Constantinople, because

evidence survives from exactly the same period for a Russian scribe purchasing and commissioning enamels in Constantinople to complete the decoration of a gospel book in 1126–32.<sup>7</sup>

Although the roundels have been discussed, usually in passing, in works devoted to the Khakhuli Triptych, they have not been investigated systematically. The primary questions about them revolve around three points: their dating; establishing the locale of their production; and the identification of the imperial women represented on them. Scholars have given less attention to the unusual iconography of the series and have not explored how the three roundels interact to create a cohesive visual statement. Moreover, scholars have not considered what these medallions suggest about female authority in Byzantium. This study analyzes the three medallions in isolation from the Khakhuli Triptych in order to offer an interpretation of the message of the original object for which they were produced.<sup>8</sup> I argue that the roundels were part of a Byzantine work manufactured in the first half of the eleventh century and that the female figures dressed in imperial garments represented on the medallions are the imperial sisters Zoe (r. 1042) and Theodora (r. 1042, 1055–56) of the Macedonian Dynasty (867–1056). The original object visualized the divinely sanctioned rule of the purple-born sisters through the representation of a series of personal encounters with holy figures.<sup>9</sup> I propose that the roundels were most likely produced in response to the turbulent events that began with a coup d'état to eliminate Zoe but which ultimately resulted in the exceptional three-month-long reign of the sisters in the spring of 1042 and that the imagery offers meaningful allusions to these current events.<sup>10</sup> This article also investigates the imperial ideology that informed the imagery to uncover the broader messages conveyed by the three medallions, paying particular attention to what the representations reveal about female authority in Byzantium. I conclude that the empresses, neither of whom ever bore a child, were portrayed as Mothers of the Byzantine Empire and that the imagery intentionally alludes to the process of regeneration, a concept particularly relevant in the waning years of the Macedonian Dynasty.

## Dating, Localizing, and Identification

Because scholarship is divided on the place of manufacture, the dating of the medallions, and the identity of the empresses represented on them, it is important to examine these questions. The earliest scholarly publications on the Khakhuli Triptych already disagree on the origin and date of the three roundels as well as on the identity of the female figures depicted in imperial garments. Nikodim Kondakov's study published in 1892 assigned the three medallions to a Georgian workshop, vaguely dating them to the early thirteenth century or before. He identified the two figures of the double coronation scene as a king and queen of Georgia and recognized the empresses on the other two roundels as Georgian queens. He tentatively linked the roundels with Queen Tamar of Georgia (r. 1184-1213).<sup>11</sup> Dimitrij Gordeev's article of 1928 rejected Kondakov's proposal of Georgian manufacture in favor of a Byzantine origin for the medallions, argued for an eleventh-century date, and identified the figures on the double coronation scene as the Byzantine empresses Zoe and Theodora. Gordeev also noted that the roundels were part of the original decoration scheme of the Khakhuli Triptych completed by 1154 and therefore concluded that the figures could not be linked with Queen Tamar.<sup>12</sup> While Kondakov supplied little evidence for his dating and attribution of the roundels, Gordeev argued on stylistic grounds that the medallions should be linked with two dateable Byzantine objects, the Crown of Constantine Monomachos, which also includes representations of the Empresses Zoe and Theodora (produced in 1042-50), and the enamel plaque showing Michael VII (r. 1071-78) and Maria of Alania incorporated into the Khakhuli Triptych (figs. 5-6). This allowed Gordeev to date the medallions to the mid-eleventh century, establish their Byzantine provenance, and thus link the female figures dressed in imperial garments with Zoe and Theodora.

Kondakov's and Gordeev's studies represent the two extremes in the dating and localization of the medallions and the identification of the figures. Later scholars, for the most part, offer interpretations within the boundaries staked out by these two pioneers. Georgian scholars usually assign the medallions to a Georgian workshop, with the notable exception of Avtandil Mikaberidze, who argued for their production in





Fig. 5. Enamel Plaque with Michael VII and Maria, Khakhuli Triptych, Georgian National Museum. Courtesy of the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre.



Byzantium. Non-Georgian scholars, however, assign the roundels to a Byzantine workshop or remain undecided about their origins.<sup>13</sup>

Most scholars writing after the publication of Gordeev's study accept an eleventh-century date and reiterate the medallions' stylistic connection with the Monomachos Crown (figs. 6-8) and/or the Michael and Maria Panel (fig. 5).<sup>14</sup> In a recent study, Etele Kiss restated the connection of the medallions to the Monomachos Crown and drew attention to an important peculiarity in the treatment of the garments evident on both works: the imperial robes are rendered with narrow sleeves on one side and wide sleeves on the other. Kiss maintained that the roundels were the closest extant stylistic parallels of the Monomachos Crown.<sup>15</sup>

I believe it is worth reaffirming and elaborating on Kiss's conclusion about the close connection between the Monomachos Crown and the three medallions, because their stylistic affinity has implications for the dating of the roundels and the identification of the empresses. Further stylistic parallels are apparent between the two works in addition to those noted by previous scholarship. The representation of the imperial *loros* (a narrow, jewel encrusted garment draped around the body) is similar on the two works in shape, color palette, decorative patterns, and the use of the red outline; the *loroi* of the roundels are simplified versions of the *loroi* of the Monomachos Crown resulting from the size differences between the pieces.<sup>16</sup> The emphatically oval faces of the female figures rendered with small red mouths and dark arched eyebrows also demonstrate strong visual similarity between the two works (figs. 1-3, 6-8). The imperial women on the roundels and the empresses on the Monomachos Crown all have similar curled cloisons inside the enamels of their haloes (figs. 1-3, 6). The crowns on the three medallions replicate almost exactly the shape and design of the crown of the emperor from the Monomachos Crown: they are simple bands decorated with a central arched jewel flanked by two smaller, rectangular stones and are topped by three pearls, one in the middle and one on each side. The shapes and decorations of the footstools are also alike between the medallions and the Crown including the decorative curled cloisons (figs. 1, 6). In addition, similar curly locks are used for the archangel on one of the roundels and for the dancing girls and the personifications on the Monomachos Crown (figs. 2, 7-8). The arrangement of the cloisons as



Fig. 6. Enamel Plaques with Empress Zoe, Constantine Monomachos, and Empress Theodora, Crown of Constantine Monomachos. © Hungarian National Museum.



Fig. 7. Enamel Plaques with Empress Theodora, Dancing Girl, and Alitheia (Truth), Crown of Constantine Monomachos. © Hungarian National Museum.



Fig. 8. Enamel Plaques with Tapeinos (Humility), Dancing Girl, and Empress Zoe, Crown of Constantine Monomachos. © Hungarian National Museum.

concentric oval shapes to represent the drapery at the elbow is used for the angel on one of the medallions as well as for the figure of Tapeinos (Humility) on the Monomachos Crown (figs. 2, 8).

A further formal feature links the two sets: all figures are shown with eyes cast strongly to the side—none gaze forward. Although the emphatic use of sidelong glances has been discussed as a characteristic feature of Georgian enamels, it is also an important attribute of Byzantine works in enamel and other media.<sup>17</sup> Sidelong glances may be found on numerous other enamel works manufactured in Byzantine workshops: e.g., the late tenth- or early eleventh-century Reliquary of the True Cross at the treasury of San Marco and the Holy Crown of Hungary dated to 1074-77.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the extensive use of sidelong glances does not suggest that the roundels are Georgian products.

Clearly, the three medallions demonstrate multiple stylistic connections with the Monomachos Crown. When the medallions are compared to the enamel plaque showing Michael VII and Maria, however, fewer



stylistic links are apparent between them (fig. 5). Although the imperial figures are approximately the same size on the roundels and the Michael and Maria panel, the latter demonstrates greater precision in execution: the outlines are more regular and crisp, the decorative motifs (e.g., the pearls forming the fringe along the edges of the *loroi* and their square- and oval-shaped decorations) are formed more precisely. The shapes and proportions of the faces are also distinctly different. The three medallions show rounded faces with narrow, pinched noses and eyes placed relatively low on the face; on the Michael and Maria panel, we see more elongated oval faces, precisely outlined almond-shaped eyes located high on the face, and longer noses with trilobed tips. The hair of the empresses on the medallions is shown with simple, dark forms paralleling the outline of the face or as shallow crescents, while the hair of Maria of Alania on the rectangular plaque is depicted with an undulating outline evoking curls and with corkscrew locks falling in front of her collar. The crowns and the garments are also represented with greater detail and more precisely drawn forms on the Michael and Maria panel, and the sidelong glance is only used for the figure of Christ. It is noteworthy that the footstool of Michael VII on this panel is decorated with a symmetrical floral pattern; this is different from the decoration of the footstools on the roundels, which use simple, curled cloisons rather than symmetrical floral motifs.<sup>19</sup>

Based on the preceding analysis, it seems reasonable to conclude that the three medallions demonstrate a particularly strong stylistic affinity with the Crown of Constantine Monomachos and are less closely related to the panel depicting Michael VII and Maria. This in turn supports the conclusion that the three medallions were produced in the first half of the eleventh century in a Byzantine workshop, possibly the same workshop that also manufactured the Monomachos Crown.

The question, however, remains: who are the female figures represented in imperial garments on the three medallions? There are four figures of imperial women on the three medallions, and scholars vary in identifying them as four, three, or two different individuals. Most Georgian art historians identify the figures in question as Georgian queens. These scholars no longer hold the view that the roundels could be linked with Queen Tamar and invariably argue for women from the

eleventh century: Helena (niece of the Byzantine emperor Romanos III and wife of the Georgian king Bagarat IV, r. 1027-72); Mariam (mother of Bagarat IV and wife of George I, r. 1014-27); Maria of Alania (daughter of Bagarat IV and wife of the Byzantine emperor Michael VII Doukas, r. 1071-78); and Queen Borena (mother of Maria of Alania) have all been proposed.<sup>20</sup> Fewer art historians have embraced Gordeev's proposal that the empresses should be identified as the Byzantine imperial sisters Zoe and Theodora.<sup>21</sup> The female figures dressed in imperial garments have also been interpreted as representations of female saints. Mikeladze recently suggested that since the figures wear a garment sporting a shield-shaped fold decorated with a double cross, they represent holy women because this motif is a characteristic feature of garments of female saints.<sup>22</sup> This argument, however, is not convincing, because the *loroi* of Zoe and Theodora on the Monomachos Crown are also shown with a fold embellished with a double cross, indicating that not only female saints but also living empresses may be represented with this decorative motif.<sup>23</sup> The use of this motif on the Monomachos Crown and on the three medallions further supports their close connection.

In my view, the four female figures shown in *loroi* on the roundels originally depicted two imperial women, the purple-born sisters Zoe and Theodora, who enjoyed unprecedented prominence as the last members of the Macedonian Dynasty and even reigned together briefly. Zoe and Theodora were daughters of the emperor Constantine VIII (r. 1025-28) and nieces of the emperor Basil II (r. 976-1025). Since Basil II never married, and his younger brother, Constantine VIII, did not have sons, Zoe and Theodora became important agents of transmitting and exercising imperial power as the last living members of the revered Macedonian Dynasty (867-1056). Zoe transferred authority to four emperors—to three by marriage: Romanos III (r. 1028-34), Michael IV (r. 1034-41), and Constantine Monomachos (r. 1042-55); and to one by adoption: Michael V (r. 1041-42).<sup>24</sup> After the revolt staged by Michael V was stamped out, Zoe and Theodora governed as joint rulers for a few months in 1042, until Zoe's third marriage to Constantine Monomachos, when Monomachos took the helm of the empire. After his death in 1055, the aging Theodora reigned as sole ruler until her own death in 1056.<sup>25</sup>

The sisters' exceptional, albeit mostly symbolic, importance is

indicated by contemporary textual sources. The court historian Michael Psellos reported that when Michael V, Zoe's adopted son, staged a coup to attain sole power and was about to banish the empress from Constantinople in April 1042, Zoe gave a speech: "She spoke of her father and her ancestors (her family had occupied the throne for four generations before she inherited the Empire) and when she recalled her uncle—I am speaking now of the famous Basil, that treasure and glory of the Roman Empire who outshone all other sovereigns who ruled over it—then her eyes filled with tears." This text clearly elucidates Zoe's dynastic import. That the populace at large shared this view is indicated by further passages of Psellos where he reports that people, including women, took to the streets to demand the reinstatement of Zoe after she was shipped off to exile. During the same uprising, Zoe's sister Theodora was also brought out of monastic retirement, to which she had been relegated since the reign of Romanos III, and was installed as empress by the citizens and members of the aristocracy.<sup>26</sup> Psellos's report of these tumultuous events clearly demonstrates that both Zoe and Theodora were perceived as embodiments of the reigning dynasty and were seen as superior beings with unique charisma and innate authority which entitled them to an exceptional position within the imperial hierarchy.

Although a few scholars have suggested that the female figures on the medallions should be identified as Zoe and Theodora, they have offered little to substantiate this view. The following discussion will present arguments in favor of identifying the figures with Zoe and Theodora. First, the close stylistic connections between the roundels and the Monomachos Crown strengthen the view that the medallions should be linked with the Byzantine empresses Zoe and Theodora rather than Georgian queens. Further, there are no other imperial women who reigned together without a male colleague from the ninth through the eleventh centuries, and no examples exist of images showing two empresses by themselves in the same period except for imagery associated with the sisters. Zoe and Theodora were represented side-by-side on gold coins issued during their joint reign, which lasted from 21 April through 12 June 1042 (fig. 9). The reverse of their *histamenon* shows identical frontal busts of the empresses holding a *labarum* (military standard) between them, while the obverse presents the orans Virgin with





Fig. 9. Histamenon of Zoe and Theodora. Obverse: Mother of God with the infant Christ in a medallion, reverse: Zoe and Theodora. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

the Christ child in a medallion hovering in front of her breast. These coins are inscribed with the invocation: “God-bearer, help the empresses Zoe and Theodora,” beseeching the Mother of God on behalf of the sisters.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, since there is no surviving evidence suggesting that pairs of empresses were typically shown in this manner in Byzantium, but there are representations of Zoe and Theodora together and in the presence of the Mother of God produced during their joint reign, the imagery of these coins supports the identification of the empresses on the Khakhuli roundels as Zoe and Theodora.

Another aspect of the imagery also suggests the identification of the female figures as Zoe and Theodora. The double coronation roundel clearly differentiates the size of the two empresses, a visual distinction also found on the other two medallions (fig. 1).<sup>28</sup> The empress encountering John the Baptist is shown with a shorter stature than the empress approached by the angel—clearly there is an attempt to differentiate the figures by their size (figs. 2-3). Zoe, the older and more important sister is likely shown as taller, while Theodora, second in line, is the shorter figure. This accords well with courtly protocol as reported by Michael Psellos: “she [Theodora] allowed Zoe to take precedence and, although both were empresses, Theodora held rank inferior to the older woman.” He also notes: “Both of them sat in front of the royal tribunal, so aligned

that Theodora was slightly behind her sister.”<sup>29</sup> Similar hierarchical order is observed between the sisters on their *histanenon* of 1042, where Zoe is placed on the privileged right side (i.e., the viewer’s left).<sup>30</sup>

It is unlikely that the medallions show other imperial women. It is improbable that the roundels represent Zoe and Theodora with their eldest sister, Eudokia. Eudokia withdrew from the court in her youth. Psellos reports that she spent her life in a monastery at her own request and notes that Eudokia did not figure in her father’s and uncle’s plans in the way the other two sisters did. Further, Eudokia died some time before the joint reign of Zoe and Theodora in 1042; therefore, it seems unlikely that Eudokia would have been included in this composition along with one of her sisters. It is also not probable that other prominent women, such as Maria Skleraina or the Georgian princess who were lovers of Constantine Monomachos in 1042–45 and 1050–55, respectively, would be included in the imagery. Although both of these women were awarded official titles and participated in imperial rituals, they remained secondary in importance to the empresses, Zoe and Theodora.<sup>31</sup>

Two further points, so far not discussed in relation to the roundels, may be advanced to support the identification of the empresses on the three roundels as Zoe and Theodora. First, extant and textually attested examples of the imperial double coronation usually show Byzantine imperial figures who had been elevated to the throne. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the double coronation roundel would depict a Georgian queen and her mother, grandmother, or mother-in-law; it is also improbable that this iconography would be applied to non-reigning Byzantine imperial women.<sup>32</sup> Second, a text by John Mauropos (a court writer of the eleventh century) attests to a lost painting that most likely showed Zoe with one of her husbands in a double coronation scene. The representation was a commemorative panel providing thanksgiving to the rulers for their patronage of a monastic church. The passage states that the monks “give this reward to their kindly benefactors [i.e., the imperial pair] by artfully depicting Thee, O Christ, in the act of crowning them here.”<sup>33</sup> This image might have memorialized the generosity of Constantine Monomachos and Zoe as Hans Belting suggested.<sup>34</sup> Yet, it is also possible that it shows Zoe with one of her other husbands. This text therefore attests to another image of an imperial double coronation

likely representing Empress Zoe, providing additional support to the proposal that the Khakhuli roundels should be linked with Zoe and Theodora. While these arguments in and of themselves do not prove with absolute certainty the identification of the figures on the medallions as Zoe and Theodora, together they furnish evidence that strengthens the likelihood of this possibility.

The lack of expressly imperial insignia in the hands of the *loros*-clad female figures on the Khakhuli roundels does not undermine their identification as Zoe and Theodora, since numerous representations show imperial figures in the presence of Christ or saints without holding imperial attributes. For example, on the Romanos Ivory, an ivory plaque dated to the tenth century, another double coronation scene shows an emperor and empress with empty hands extended to Christ.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, one may conclude that Zoe and Theodora are crowned or blessed in the central roundel, while an angel greets Zoe and John the Baptist approaches Theodora on the other two medallions. The divinely sanctioned authority of the purple-born sisters is articulated emphatically through the imagery of personal, intimate encounters between them and holy figures.

## Original Context

It is impossible to determine who commissioned the medallions and when, or to ascertain whether the roundels form a complete series or other pieces now lost had been part of the original set. Nor is it possible to conclude whether the empresses commissioned the object for themselves or as a gift within the court or the diplomatic sphere, or whether Zoe and Theodora were its intended recipients.<sup>36</sup> Yet, the analysis of the imagery will reveal a close connection between the patron of the enamels and the imperial court: the intentional juxtaposition of the imagery of the medallions with numismatic types of Zoe's husbands, the pronounced allusions to preoccupations of the Macedonian Dynasty, and the discernible references to feminine concerns and current events suggest that the patron was familiar with the ideological concerns and the recent history of the imperial family. This indicates the possibility that the intended audience for the work would have been someone



within the sphere of the court, possibly even the empresses themselves.

It seems unlikely that the roundels were produced during the reigns of Zoe's and Theodora's uncle and father or of Zoe's first and second husbands and adopted son, or during the sovereignty of Theodora.<sup>37</sup> It is, however, possible that the medallions were manufactured during the reign of Zoe's last husband, Constantine Monomachos, because evidence survives for the promotion of the sisters in images and ceremonials during his tenure. The Monomachos Crown and an illuminated page from a collection of homilies by John Chrysostom, Sinai gr. 364, present Monomachos in the company of the two sisters.<sup>38</sup> Textual references also attest that the sisters appeared in the company of Constantine Monomachos on ceremonial occasions, as, for instance, during the triumph celebrating the defeat of George Maniakes in 1043. A letter of John Mauropous to Constantine Monomachos from 1047 includes a greeting not only to the emperor but also to the two sisters, indicating that it was appropriate to address all three rulers together after Constantine became emperor. Mauropous also left behind poems that praise Constantine Monomachos and the sisters together.<sup>39</sup> Although the emphatic presentation of Zoe and Theodora as principal members of the imperial threesome during Monomachos's reign did not reflect the actual circumstances of the exercise of power, since the empresses did not participate in government after his accession, it acknowledged Constantine's indebtedness to the sisters and presented an ideal view of the imperial hierarchy underscoring the continuation of the Macedonian lineage.<sup>40</sup> The prominence of Zoe and Theodora during the reign of Monomachos allows for the possibility that the medallions representing the sisters were produced in this period, yet the fact that the emperor himself is not included in the imagery militates against this. Extant images and texts that represent the empresses during Monomachos's reign usually include the emperor as well.<sup>41</sup> While it is possible that the original object could have included a medallion with a representation of Monomachos, this cannot be proven. It is also conceivable that Monomachos would have presented this object to the sisters upon his accession to give visible assurance to his intent to uphold their position. Such a declaration would have been prudent to make in the wake of the recent revolt of Michael V.

It appears, however, most likely that the medallions were manufactured during the reign of Zoe and Theodora in 1042. Accordingly, one may hypothesize that the enamels responded to the upheaval of the uprising engineered by Zoe's adopted son, Michael V (r. 1041-42), in the spring of 1042. While this coup aimed to remove Zoe from the imperial palace, it in fact led to Michael's quick demise and to the unprecedented rule of the sisters. The revolt began on 18 April, the Sunday after Easter in 1042, yet by 21 April, Zoe and Theodora were installed as sovereigns and ruled together till 12 June.<sup>42</sup>

Although several significant religious festivals took place during the joint reign of the sisters as well as celebrations associated with imperial history and the history of the capital, two festivals, namely the Feast of the Ascension and Pentecost Sunday emerge as the most likely occasions on which the enameled work could have been presented.<sup>43</sup> The Feast of the Ascension was celebrated by the emperor and his court at the Church of the Virgin at the Pege (Source) on a Thursday forty days following Easter.<sup>44</sup> The imperial acclamations performed at the Pege portray the Virgin in the act of crowning the emperors, a motif that is represented on the double coronation medallion. Therefore, there appears to be a strong rhetorical link between the role of the Virgin in bestowing imperial authority and protection celebrated in the acclamation during the Feast of the Ascension and the iconography of the double coronation medallion, a topic I explore below more fully. Pentecost Sunday, ten days later, was celebrated at the palace and Hagia Sophia. The acclamations recited during the palace receptions offered an emphatic comparison between the crowned emperor and the apostles receiving the Holy Spirit in the form of flames: "Christ, who conducted the nations to the recognition of the truth by the tongues of fire has himself, pious benefactors crowned by God, by the visit of the Spirit, placed from the height of the sky on your precious head a holy crown."<sup>45</sup> The acclamations reiterate that the rulers are crowned directly by God or the Trinity. Kathleen Corrigan noted that Psalm 20(21), also recited during the ceremony of imperial coronation, had a pivotal role at the end of the Pentecost liturgy; the poem stresses that the king receives his authority directly from God who "placed a crown of pure gold on his head" (Psalm 20[21], 3). This indicates that Byzantine audiences saw

a strong connection between the ritual of imperial coronations and the celebration of Pentecost.<sup>46</sup> In addition, it is worth remembering that two emperors of the Macedonian Dynasty were crowned on Pentecost: the founder of the lineage, Basil I, in 866, and his grandson, Constantine VII (the sisters' great-grandfather), in 908.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the celebration of the liturgical festival of the Pentecost offered a framework in which Byzantine audiences would be reminded not only of the biblical events and their theological significance, but also of the divine source of imperial power, of the similarity of the rulers to the apostles illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and of the memory of two illustrious predecessors of Zoe and Theodora who were crowned on this very day. Further, Pentecost Sunday was one of the days during the liturgical year when baptism was performed in Byzantium.<sup>48</sup> One of the readings during the liturgy of the Ascension emphasizes the similarity of baptism and Pentecost (Acts 1:5), while the Pentecost Sunday liturgy itself includes a text that describes the apostle Philip baptizing an Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-39), creating a further connection between the feast and the sacrament.<sup>49</sup> The emphasis on the coronation of the rulers in the imperial ceremonies of the Ascension and Pentecost and the associations of these feasts with baptism provide a meaningful ideological framework for interpreting the imagery of the medallions, particularly since baptism is also referenced on the third medallion of the series; the roundels place the sisters within the liturgical cycle of the great feasts and position them firmly within the tradition of Byzantine rulership and the history of the Macedonian Dynasty.

The hypothesis that the object was presented either during the Feast of the Ascension or on Pentecost Sunday may be supported with John Cotsonis's analysis of the use of personal seals described by Anna Komnene in the *Alexiad*. When Anna Dalassene reigned on behalf of her son, Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118), during his absence from the capital in the month of August, she used seals with images of the Dormition and the Transfiguration, liturgical feasts whose celebration takes place in August.<sup>50</sup> This indicates that the use of official objects in the court could be linked with the calendar of liturgical feasts. It is possible, therefore to suggest a connection between the imagery of the double coronation medallion and the celebration of the Ascension or

the Pentecost, although the connection here is less direct and is created through allusions between imperial acclamations, liturgical texts, and the visual imagery.

### The Double Coronation of Two Empresses

The Virgin Mary is shown accompanied by two empresses on the first medallion (fig. 1).<sup>51</sup> The Virgin, clad in a light blue undergarment and a dark blue cloak, stands on a rectangular footstool. She lifts her hands towards the crowns of the two women who flank her. The empresses are dressed identically and have similar facial features and hairstyles. Their light blue garments are patterned with yellow heart-shaped motifs, white pearls, and roundels on the shoulders; on top, they wear the *loros* terminated by a shield-shaped fold adorned with a cross. Red flap-like extensions hang from their crowns framing their necks. These are most likely an awkward representation of the *prependulia* (hanging attachments of the imperial crown).<sup>52</sup> The empresses hold scrolls and raise their right palms in front of their chests. The figure on the right of the Virgin is taller, indicating her senior status.

The Virgin Mary, often designated as the Mother of God in Middle Byzantine texts, was the primary protector of the city of Constantinople because it was believed in this period that the city was dedicated to her. The Mother of God was the principal intercessor in Byzantium, and her position as mediator was highlighted with growing frequency from the eighth and ninth centuries. Her intercessory role in part derived from her position in the miracle of the incarnation and consequent status as the Mother of God, and this concept received increased emphasis in texts and images after the mid ninth century.<sup>53</sup> But the cult of the Mother of God was also closely tied with imperial ideology—a prominent late tenth-century mosaic in the southwest vestibule of Hagia Sophia, placed over the entrance where the emperor frequently arrived at the Great Church, visualizes this close association. The panel demonstrates the intimate link between the imperial office, the city, and the Mother of God and endorses the fiction that the first emperor of Byzantium dedicated the city to her. The mosaic shows the enthroned Virgin with the Christ child on her lap flanked by the emperors Constantine the



Great (r. 306-337) and Justinian (r. 527-565), who each present a model to her, of the city and the church, respectively.<sup>54</sup> This representation articulates the Virgin's role as protector and patron saint of the imperial office and the city clearly.

The double coronation of the two sisters is the only surviving double coronation image that shows two imperial women.<sup>55</sup> Double coronation scenes normally depict imperial couples or an emperor and his son crowned by Christ. Scholars agree that this iconography articulates the divine origin and legal status of imperial power granted through the act of coronation.<sup>56</sup> Others, however, also emphasize that the imagery does not necessarily signify a particular historical coronation but in a more general sense suggests Christ's benediction towards the imperial couple, and still others maintain that this imagery also highlights the idea of marriage.<sup>57</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere, traditional double coronation images representing imperial couples highlight the importance of the empress in Byzantium by showing her with divinely sanctioned power and authority that equals that of the emperor. The iconography suggests that the imperial power is exercised by an orthodox couple joined through marriage rather than by a single individual, clearly elevating the empress above the position she was actually accorded in law and political theory.<sup>58</sup> Double coronation scenes are symbolic representations that lack specific documentary details.<sup>59</sup> The double coronation image of the imperial sisters on the Khakhuli roundel visualizes their divinely endowed power along with the eminent dynastic position they achieved as the last members of a revered imperial dynasty. The image also highlights their close link with one another and presents them as tightly knit imperial colleagues solely responsible for the future of the empire. Although the image propagated by the medallion belies the actual relationship of the sisters, which was frequently acrimonious according to contemporary sources, it projects an idealized view of these two exceptional women wielding power with divine support.<sup>60</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Virgin rather than Christ carries out the coronation on this medallion. All extant double coronation images that date before this enamel show Christ rather than the Virgin performing the act of coronation or blessing; therefore this medallion is the first

surviving example of this version of the iconography. It is possible that this adaptation of the iconography was invented for Zoe and Theodora. It is worth asking why the Khakhuli medallion modifies the existing double coronation iconography by representing the Virgin rather than Christ in the act of crowning the empresses. One reason could be to maintain visual consistency with other images showing Zoe and Theodora who issued gold coins emblazoned with effigies of themselves on one side and of the Virgin on the other during their joint reign in 1042 (fig. 9). Yet, it is also tempting to speculate that given the prominent political and dynastic authority of the sisters, it seemed appropriate to adapt the prevailing iconography to fit female rulers. Replacing the figure of Christ with his mother in an image usually associated with him underscores the change, highlights the female gender of all three protagonists, and draws attention to the pivotal role of the Mother of God as an intercessor: it is an image of female imperial authority thoroughly linked with the benevolence of the highest ranking holy woman and mother.<sup>61</sup>

While in most images and textual sources Christ is credited with crowning the emperor, the *Book of Ceremonies* provides instances within the chapter devoted to the Feast of the Ascension where the Virgin bestows the crown upon the ruler.<sup>62</sup> As I noted above, the celebration of this feast fell within the period of the joint reign of the sisters in 1042, suggesting a connection with the imagery of the medallion. The Green Faction chants the following acclamation during the Feast of the Ascension: “You, source of life of the Romans, Virgin, Mother of God the Word, be sole fellow fighter with the sovereigns [born] in the Purple, who have received their crown from you, because in the Purple they have gained you as impregnable shield in all things.”<sup>63</sup> During the same feast, the Blues sing: “Having received invincible defense and virginal protection, benefactors crowned by God, and glorifying you by her immaculate intercession, you are invincible to the enemy nations. Because, it is she, who in the day of war, overshadows your heads and who reveals you crowned with victories for the happiness and glory of the Romans.”<sup>64</sup> These passages portray the Virgin in seemingly contradictory terms, both as a mother and a military general; she is described as a life-giving spring and virgin mother and a warrior who fights alongside the rulers to ensure their invincibility and guarantee their victory. Her

intercession and active participation in the granting of power to the emperors is stressed emphatically. Yet, in the second passage Christ is described as crowning the emperors, while the Virgin protects them and reveals their victories—there is clearly fluidity in conceptualizing the divine source of imperial power either through the direct agency of Christ or the intercession of his mother even within the same text. The passages from the *Book of Ceremonies* reflect a militant vision of the Mother of God while also underscoring her role as a giver of life.

In light of the above passages, one may speculate that the figure of the crowning Virgin on the medallion was intended to emphasize her military credentials in order to make up for the sisters' lack of such expertise.<sup>65</sup> It also seems significant that Zoe and Theodora are represented on their joint coinage holding the *labarum* (military standard) between them, similarly emphasizing military might and triumph. The use of the *labarum* is important in this context, as no other empresses of the Middle Byzantine period had been shown with the *labarum* on coins prior to the sisters' joint coinage (fig. 9).<sup>66</sup> The image of the orans Virgin that accompanies the empresses on the other side of this coin has been linked with imperial victory, further supporting the notion that the military associations of the Virgin may have been of central concern to Zoe and Theodora (or their image makers), at least at the level of visual propaganda, when they ruled in their own right in 1042.<sup>67</sup> Further, when Theodora reigned by herself in 1055–56, she was shown on coins with the Virgin handing the *labarum* to her.<sup>68</sup> Pentcheva has shown that during the second half of the tenth century, generals who usurped the throne strongly promoted the Mother of God as a fellow fighter and embodiment of imperial Victory in order to neutralize the perception of the Mother of God as defender of the purple-born rulers.<sup>69</sup> The promotion of the Virgin as military protector and bringer of victory, therefore, was a relevant concept and suited the ideological needs of the sisters. The medallion showing the double coronation of the two empresses successfully evokes various perceptions of the Virgin present in imperial ideology from the eighth century: the image alludes to both military associations and protection of the rightful heirs born in the purple. Finally, it is important to remember that one of the great religious feasts celebrated during the short reign of Zoe and Theodora

in 1042 was that of the Ascension. It is possible that the double coronation image evokes texts that would have been recited during this feast, alluding to the Virgin as an intercessor in bestowing imperial authority and emphasizing aspects of the Mother of God that coincide with pivotal virtues required of a reigning emperor (such as military might, invincibility, victory in war, power of protection), yet here, these virtues are applied to empresses exercising independent rule conferred through the hand of the Virgin Mother.

The enamel roundel showing the double coronation of two empresses may also be seen as a visual response to the widely circulated gold coins of Zoe's first husband, Romanos III (r. 1028-34). These show him crowned or blessed by the Virgin on the obverse (fig. 10).<sup>70</sup> The sisters' image makers adapted a well-known iconographic type and defined their representation as a new alternative against the public official image of Zoe's first husband. The numismatic type recalls Romanos's coins yet supersedes them by offering a different vision of imperial authority showing exclusively female figures and by reiterating the continuity of the Macedonian Dynasty.

The medallion representing the double coronation of the two empresses offers a meaningful adaptation of existing iconography to



Fig. 10. Histamenon of Romanos III. Obverse: Christ enthroned, reverse: Mother of God crowns Romanos III. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.



create an image appropriate for female rulers. The representation accentuates the harmonious unity and unprecedented authority of the sisters and highlights their intimate connection to the Mother of God and her powerful intercession on their behalf. The iconography also alludes to the Virgin's military credentials, which she bestows on the sisters. The apposition of the double coronation image with the iconography of the coins of Romanos III amplifies the meaning of the enamel by alluding to changes in rulers and underscores the legitimacy of the sisters' sovereignty. The association of the empresses with the Mother of God is taken further in the next medallion, which introduces one of the sisters into the scene of the Annunciation.

### The Empress and the Angel

On the second roundel (fig. 2), an angel in blue garments approaches a standing empress. The angel gestures to her with his right hand and grasps a scroll in his left hand.<sup>71</sup> The empress is rendered identically to the imperial women on the previous medallion. She holds a scroll in her left hand and lifts her right hand in front of her chest in an open-palmed greeting. She inclines her head slightly to the right as she gazes at the angel striding toward her.

This medallion modifies the iconography of the Annunciation. While Mikaberidze suggested that the archangel could be identified as either Gabriel or Michael, it seems more likely that the figure represents Gabriel given the strong visual affinity of the roundel's composition with Byzantine Annunciation scenes. Although Michael was a far more popular figure in Byzantium than Gabriel, here almost certainly Gabriel is shown.<sup>72</sup> The annunciation-like scene adapts established visual iconography by inserting the figure of an empress into the position where one would expect the Virgin Mary.<sup>73</sup> The interaction between the angel and the empress replicates the exchange between Gabriel and the Virgin in standard representations of the Annunciation, as, for example, seen on f. 3r in Paris Gr. 510 (ninth century) or the silver gilt enkolpion (reliquary to be worn over the chest) from Maastricht (ca. 1075–1100) (figs. 11, 12).<sup>74</sup> The Khakhuli medallion retains the footstool of the Virgin for the figure of the empress and presents the figures with bodily positions and gestures



Fig. 11. Annunciation, Visitation, and Scenes from the Life of Jonah, Paris gr. 510, f. 3r. Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Fig. 12. Enkolpion with the Annunciation, Treasury, Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk, Maastricht, The Netherlands. Photography by Werner Forman provided by Art Resource, NY.

that recall the interaction of Gabriel and the Virgin in Annunciation scenes. Yet the medallion also introduces notable changes to the standard iconography: normally Gabriel holds a staff and the Virgin a spindle, yet on the roundel these objects have been replaced with scrolls. The roundel also omits the usual basket of wool as well as the throne and the house of the Virgin. Still, the numerous commonalities with standard Annunciation scenes (e.g., overall composition, bodily positioning and gestures, the presence of the footstool) clearly support the identification of the scene as a repurposed Annunciation. Although we see other biblical figures represented in scenes of annunciation (e.g., Anna, Joachim, Zachariah, and the shepherds of Bethlehem), historical figures are not normally shown in this manner. However, emperors of the Macedonian Dynasty cultivated a strong devotional connection with archangels, and there are numerous representations that show emperors in the presence of angels.<sup>75</sup> Yet none of these images evokes the Annunciation as closely as the Khakhuli medallion.

Placing an empress in an Annunciation scene fits with the Byzantine practice of linking the figure of the emperor with the great religious

feasts of the liturgical calendar. However, empresses are not typically linked with the great feasts either in texts or images.<sup>76</sup> While there are many established rhetorical formulas that present models of behavior for the emperor (e.g., David, Moses, Christ, Constantine the Great), with the exception of Helena, there are no such figures that Byzantine texts and images draw on consistently when it comes to the empress. Texts often apply the vocabulary of solar symbolism to empresses and frequently place emphasis on their physical beauty even including comparisons with ancient goddesses, queens, or famous works of art.<sup>77</sup> Although one may find some rhetorical connections between empresses and Christological narratives, as in the hagiography of the Empress Theodora (wife of Theophilos, r. 829-42), this is not common in Byzantine texts. The *vitae* of Theodora and Theophano (first wife of Leo VI, r. 886-912) compare the empresses to Old Testament figures and saints; Theodora is linked with Joseph, Abraham, Job, David, the apostles, and even Christ, while Theophano is compared to Sarah, Rebecca, and the early Christian saint, Eisdandoul.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Nike Koutrakou has recently drawn attention to passages in a letter of Theodore Studite to Empress Irene (r. 797-802) and a poem celebrating the Empress Theophano that employ literary allusions suggesting a comparison of these imperial women with the Mother of God.<sup>79</sup> While there is no firmly established tradition of linking empresses with Christological or sacred narratives and comparing them with biblical figures, textual sources indicate that empresses may be associated with or compared to a great variety of biblical and holy figures, although without great consistency. On this medallion we see a type of rhetoric, more frequently and more consistently used for the emperor, employed for an empress.<sup>80</sup>

Inserting an empress into a scene of the Annunciation links her with the respected tradition of visual and textual rhetoric widely applied to male rulers and connects her with one of the primary feasts of the liturgical calendar. Moreover, the inclusion of an empress in this iconography may also underscore further expectations and hopes for the future of the empire, namely for an heir to the throne—after all, the Annunciation is the visual expression of the conception of the Christ child in Mary's body. A hymn of Romanos the Melodist of the sixth century articulates this idea clearly:



Come, let us accompany the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary,  
And let us greet her as mother and nourisher of our life.  
For it is not only fitting for the general to salute the queen,  
But it is also possible for the humble to see her and address her.  
All generations call her blessed as mother of God, and they pray.<sup>81</sup>

Romanos's text equates the visit of Gabriel to the Virgin with her transition into motherhood and also exemplifies the widespread Byzantine literary topos of alluding to the Virgin Mary as queen. This type of verbal rhetoric may have prompted the placement of the empress in the position of the Virgin in this scene of the angelic salutation.<sup>82</sup> The artist inverts the standard Byzantine textual topos of describing the Virgin Mary as queen on the enamel and applies it to the empress who is shown inhabiting a visual or rhetorical position normally occupied by the Virgin: the image suggests a comparison or downright identification between the empress and the Mother of God. Linking a purple-born empress with the scene of the Annunciation activates further associations of its meaning and iconography for Byzantine audiences. As a *porphyrogennetos*, Zoe was expected to produce an heir to the throne.<sup>83</sup> The Virgin, who herself descended from the royal lineage of King David, was entrusted with spinning the purple thread of the temple curtain, a concept that both emphasizes her royal lineage and her later role in the incarnation in giving birth to God.<sup>84</sup> Through multiple associations that link together imperial colors, royal descent, motherhood, and the miracle of the incarnation, the empress shown on the medallion is compared to the Mother of God and is enfolded into the mystery of the incarnation. The interpolation of the figure of an empress into the Christological narrative conveys in unmistakable terms the sacred charisma bestowed upon her, which in turn accentuates her exceptional authority within Byzantine society while also highlighting her position as a maternal figure.

The Annunciation had been linked with ideas of fertility and renewal of nature since the early Byzantine period, and objects displaying images of the Annunciation had been used as amulets to aid and protect marriage and to cure infertility from an early date.<sup>85</sup> Brigitte Pitarakis noted that "the Virgin of the Annunciation is the most popular image on devotional objects belonging to women" in early Byzantium.<sup>86</sup> The

Annunciation appears to have remained a popular image on objects belonging to women in the Middle Byzantine period. A late eleventh-century enkolpion in Maastricht pairs an image of the Annunciation on the back side with a representation of the bust of the praying Virgin (fig. 12) on the front. It was owned by Irene Synande who invoked the intercessory power of the Virgin to mediate with her Son for absolution from her sins, as the dedicatory inscription states.<sup>87</sup> A lead seal stamped with the Annunciation and requesting the blessing of childbirth, which may have belonged to the Empress Zoe, provides another example. The image on the obverse is accompanied by the legend: "Hail, thou that art highly favored." The reverse displays the invocation: "Thou who hast received joy, give joy to Zoe."<sup>88</sup> This seal provides further evidence for Zoe's connection with the iconography of the Annunciation and with her concerns about conceiving a child. Other lead seals of the Byzantine elite stamped with the image of the Annunciation survive from the sixth century on. Among the fifty-four seals that carry the image of the Annunciation, six belong to women (all six dating to the eleventh and twelfth centuries). While it is clear that not only women used the image of the Annunciation on their seals, Cotsonis's work confirms that women did favor the Annunciation: of the seven surviving women's seals from the sixth to twelfth centuries, all but one show the scene of the Annunciation. Clearly, the Annunciation had a broad appeal for both genders; the frequent invocations inscribed on seals showing the Annunciation attest to the deep devotion to the Virgin and the steadfast belief in her powers to intercede on behalf of both men and women.<sup>89</sup> Yet women still demonstrate a preference for selecting the Annunciation for objects owned by them in the Middle Byzantine period. Although it appears that Zoe never became a mother as all her marriages took place late in her life, she contributed to imperial renewal by facilitating the transmission of power to several emperors either by marriage or adoption.

In addition to its rich associations with motherhood and fertility, the imagery of the Annunciation is also closely linked with imperial authority in Byzantium. A homily of Leo VI (r. 886–912), the great-great-grandfather of Zoe and Theodora, on the Annunciation creates a particularly strong connection between the Mother of God and imperial rule. The emperor implores the archangel to visit the imperial city

rather than Nazareth and praises the Virgin Mother for bringing light (i.e., divine wisdom) into the world. Leo exploits the rhetorical topos of describing the Mother of God as an empress; he addresses her as empress (*basilissa*) several times in the sermon and credits her with bestowing the imperium on him.<sup>90</sup> The interweaving of contemporary and biblical history is a notable aspect of Leo's homily, which also characterizes another object linked with him, the so-called Ivory Scepter of Leo (fig. 13). The backside shows the Virgin turning slightly to the emperor as she places a pearl in his crown while Gabriel stands next to her facing the viewer frontally. This ivory does not display the traditional iconography of the Annunciation since the figures of the Virgin and Gabriel are shown as busts facing out rather than interacting with one another. Nonetheless, this composition alludes to the Annunciation as it visualizes imperial investiture interweaving moments from biblical history and the lifetime of Leo.<sup>91</sup> It seems likely that this type of textual and visual rhetoric was familiar to Zoe and Theodora (and their advisors), who sprang from the same dynasty as Leo VI and who were likely acquainted with his



Fig. 13. Ivory Scepter with the Virgin Crowning Leo VI, bpk. Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Photography by Joerg P. Anders provided by Art Resource, NY.

writings and the works of art associated with him. Zoe's portrayal in an annunciation-like scene would have evoked the memory of her revered great-great-grandfather through visual and textual allusions and would have lent additional authority and legitimacy to her representation.

A further set of imperial associations is evident during the celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation in Constantinople, which may also be connected with the imagery of the Khakhuli medallion. The Feast of the Annunciation included the celebration of the liturgy at the Church of the Chalkoprateia (copper market), one of the most prestigious Marian sanctuaries of the city. It boasted garment relics of the Mother of God, housed the miraculous image of Christ Antiphonetes, and was closely linked with imperial ideology through continued and copious imperial patronage.<sup>92</sup> Following the example of Basil I, who restored the building, Zoe patronized the Chapel dedicated to Christ Antiphonetes, and she may even have been put to rest there. Zoe's patronage of the Chalkoprateia—which began as early as her first marriage (1028–34)—where the liturgy of the Feast of the Annunciation unfolded may have provided further incentive to insert the figure of the empress into the scene of the Annunciation.<sup>93</sup> In turn, the image of Zoe encountering the archangel Gabriel in an annunciation-like scene would have reminded viewers of the intimate connections between the Macedonian Dynasty (and Zoe in particular), the Feast of the Annunciation, and a revered Marian shrine and its esteemed miracle-working relics and icons.

Finally, it is also conceivable that the representation of the empress greeted by an angel responds to the coins of Zoe's second husband, Michael IV (r. 1034–41), minted most likely in Thessaloniki (fig. 14). These coins show full figures of the emperor and an archangel standing side by side; the angel, whom Grierson identified reasonably as Michael, hands a *labarum* to the emperor.<sup>94</sup> The composition evokes the iconography of the Annunciation. The representation of Zoe greeted by Gabriel may have offered another intentional comparison between the empress and such coins of Michael IV, bringing the enamel into dialogue with official imagery issued during Michael's reign. Zoe's representation transforms the image of the Annunciation and presents the empress in the place of the Mother of God while also pointedly reminding viewers





Fig. 14. Histamenon of Michael IV. Obverse: Enthroned Christ, reverse: Archangel Michael hands labarum to Michael IV. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

that she is replacing Michael IV by adopting and adapting imagery he propagated on his coins.

The medallion showing the quasi-Annunciation scene offers a rich set of allusions. It presents Zoe as a ruler promoting the ideology, customs, and remembrance of her revered predecessors and as a sovereign who exercises imperial behavior in consonance with her forefathers. The juxtaposition of the medallion's iconography with numismatic imagery of her second husband presents Zoe as a legitimate authority superseding him, using similar visual apposition as noted in the case of the double coronation scene vis-à-vis coins of Romanos III. By inserting the empress into the place of the Virgin Annunciate, the roundel evokes ideas about motherhood, fertility, and renewal, concepts applied broadly to the idea of the regeneration of imperial power. The visual evocation of imperial ideology and liturgical practice continues on the third medallion, complementing and reiterating the complex layers of meaning conveyed on the first two roundels.

### The Empress and the Baptist

The third medallion (fig. 3) shows an empress with raised palms approaching John the Baptist. John lifts his right hand to greet her

while in his left hand holding a staff and a scroll inscribed with the words “behold the Lamb of God” from John 1:29. A short, stylized tree with an axe leaning against it appears between the two figures.<sup>95</sup>

John the Baptist, or the Prodromos (Precursor or Forerunner), was one of the most popular saints in Byzantium after the Virgin due to his closeness to Christ as a relative, witness, and forerunner.<sup>96</sup> He was also a popular intercessor. He was closely linked with the rite of baptism and the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated on January 6, commemorating Christ’s baptism.<sup>97</sup> The liturgical year included nine commemorations of the saint in Constantinople. There were thirty-six churches dedicated to him in the capital and its immediate vicinity.<sup>98</sup> John the Baptist also appears frequently in visual images, such as portable devotional objects, icons, and monumental church decoration schemes. Additionally, the Baptist was a saint widely revered by Byzantine women, no doubt due to his wondrous birth to an elderly woman past childbearing age.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly to the visual strategy of the previous two medallions, this roundel also modifies existing iconographic types, which include the following three scenes. First, the Baptist holding a scroll with an inscription from John 1:29 is a standard representation of the saint alone or as a member of the gallery of saints. Second, John preaching to the Pharisees and Sadducees usually appears in a landscape with an axe leaning against a tree. Third, when John is shown conversing with Christ, the scene normally includes only the two protagonists, and the motif of the axe at the root of the tree is absent.<sup>100</sup> Neither the preaching scene nor John’s encounter with Christ typically shows the Baptist with the unfurled scroll inscribed with John 1:29. The Khakhuli medallion draws on these three iconographic types and through a simple, yet meaningful combination of motifs invokes a rich web of visual, textual, ceremonial, and liturgical associations. It is important to examine the various visual motifs of the medallion in order to create a framework for interpreting the imagery.

The tree with an axe resting against it makes reference to Matthew 3:7-10, which relates an event during John’s baptizing in the Jordan. He addresses Pharisees and Sadducees approaching him:

Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? *Produce fruit in*

keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. *The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*<sup>101</sup>

This statement emphasizes repentant behavior and the importance of following the genuine teachings of God and evokes the coming Judgment, where the axe is understood as an instrument of judgment.<sup>102</sup> The tree and the axe shown on the medallion refer to the “good fruit” (or lack thereof) and may be interpreted as an allusion to providing a legitimate heir to the empire in the context of this representation. Biblical passages or phrases were used extensively by Byzantine writers in various genres, such as encomia, historical accounts, letters, etc., to suggest a range of meanings going well beyond the strict interpretation of the original text. Pitarakis, for example, noted that references to Matthew 3:7-10 were employed in texts associated with the empress Anna Komnene in order to help articulate contemporary concerns while also buttressing them with the authority of the scripture.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the representation of the axe leaning against the tree would bring to mind Matthew 3:7-10 (and related passages) and that this biblical reference in turn could evoke a contemporary idea, such as ensuring legitimate succession within the empire.

The medallion showing the encounter of the Baptist and an empress shares compositional similarities with scenes representing the meeting of John and Christ.<sup>104</sup> An example of this scene is found in the southwest chapel of the Katholikon of Hosios Loukas, a monument approximately contemporary with the Khakhuli medallions (fig. 15), located in the topmost register of the adjoining north and east walls.<sup>105</sup> Christ holds a scroll in his left hand and blesses with his right as he advances toward the Baptist who extends his left hand in greeting. The inscriptions of the fresco, derived from Matthew 3:14-15 and 16-17, indicate that the chapel was used for the service of the Great Blessing of the Waters (performed on the eve of Epiphany) and the rite of baptism, as the inscribed passages were recited during these liturgical celebrations. Nano Chatzidakis linked the fresco with the developing significance of the ritual of the Blessing of



Fig. 15. The Encounter of John the Baptist and Christ, south-west chapel, Katholikon, Hosios Loukas, near Stiris. Courtesy of Sharon J. Gerstel.

the Waters which, from the eleventh century on, was not only performed on the eve of Epiphany, but also on other feast days and Sundays.<sup>106</sup> The Monastery of Hosios Loukas has been linked with imperial patronage as well as with the benefaction of members of the local Theban aristocracy. It seems clear that the artists working at Hosios Loukas were familiar with Constantinopolitan art and possibly even had been trained in the capital.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the fresco at Hosios Loukas likely exemplifies an iconographic type that enjoyed popularity in Constantinople and that may also have been associated with new liturgical developments.

The visual similarity of the Khakhuli roundel with scenes depicting the encounter of John and Christ prompts the viewer to link the Khakhuli medallion with such representations and to recognize a comparison drawn between the empress and Christ. The prominent presence

of the words “behold the Lamb of God” on the scroll may also suggest that the empress approaching the Baptist is stepping into the role of Christ or, at the very least, is compared to him. Yet, the inclusion of the motif of the axe at the root of the tree, usually associated with John’s preaching to the Pharisees and Sadducees, broadens the possible readings, suggesting that the empress could be seen as a member of the crowd listening to John’s speech. The tradition of comparing Christ and the emperor was firmly established in Byzantium by the middle period, yet a mimetic connection between an empress and Christ is unusual.<sup>108</sup> On this medallion, however, the standard rhetorical topos of comparing the emperor to Christ is applied to an empress. In addition, the encounter between the empress and John the Baptist also reminds viewers of the important celebrations of the Feast of the Epiphany and the Great Blessing of the Waters, pivotal liturgical events closely linked with the concepts of renewal and regeneration.<sup>109</sup>

The text inscribed on John’s scroll is excerpted from the following passage in John 1:29: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” This account emphasizes John’s recognition of Jesus as the true Savior while he baptized at Bethany, and the section included on the medallion, “Behold the Lamb (*amnos*) of God,” highlights the idea of sacrifice.

The word *amnos* is primarily used to denote the young, sacrificial lamb.<sup>110</sup> In a liturgical context *amnos* came to mean the center of the Eucharistic bread that is cut out from its middle in commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, *amnos* in Byzantine saints’ lives may also designate men and women who dedicate themselves to monastic life.<sup>112</sup> *Amnos*, therefore, had a wide range of meanings in Byzantine culture, yet its primary connotations conveyed the ideas of sacrifice and renunciation. Further, the figure of the Baptist also conjured up monastic associations because he was seen as the embodiment of ideal ascetic and monastic behavior.<sup>113</sup> Mikaberidze also recognized an allusion to monasticism in the medallion, although he offered a different interpretation than that argued here.<sup>114</sup> It is significant to consider that both Zoe’s and Theodora’s lives were linked with monastic retirement: Theodora spent more than a decade at the Petrion Monastery, from the



beginning of the reign of Romanos III until April 1042, while Zoe was banished briefly to the convent on the Princes' Islands during the coup of Michael V in 1042. Psellos emphasizes the transition from monastic to courtly environment when reporting about Zoe's and Theodora's reinstatement to imperial power after the revolt of 1042. When Michael V, under intense pressure, brought Zoe back to the palace, he ordered that she remain in monastic garb. When he displayed her to the populace, most people did not recognize the empress because she was still dressed in a nun's habit. Psellos also recounts that when the popular uprising that developed in opposition to Michael's coup brought Theodora out of her convent, she immediately changed into splendid raiment so that she would arrive at her coronation at Hagia Sophia in appropriate vestments.<sup>115</sup> The portrayal of changes in dress allowed Psellos to emphasize the tribulations the imperial sisters underwent during their exclusion from power. Therefore, the representation of an empress conversing with John the Baptist could have evoked in the minds of those familiar with recent events the sisters' ultimate victory over Michael V after their banishment to monastic communities.

The figure of the Baptist was also intimately linked with Byzantine imperial authority. Constantinople was in possession of several of his relics, among them his arm, which appears to have been kept in a palatine church in the Middle Byzantine period, the Pharos.<sup>116</sup> Connection between imperial authority and John the Baptist was already established in the early centuries and continued into the Middle Byzantine era. The fundamental association between John the Baptist and the imperial office was made manifest at the Baptist's suburban church at the Hebdomon, a sanctuary closely linked with imperial victory as early as the late fourth and fifth centuries. It was also associated with imperial power in more direct ways—elements of imperial inauguration ceremonies and, on occasion, even coronations took place at the Hebdomon between the late fourth and the second half of the tenth century.<sup>117</sup> The monastic church of St. John Studios was also closely associated with imperial power. Among its important relics was the head of the Baptist, which Abbot Alexios took to the ill Basil II in 1025. Although the relic's presence at the sickbed of the emperor did not produce healing because the sixty-seven year old emperor died later that night, it aided his departure

from earthly life and also facilitated the appointment of Alexios to the position of patriarch by the dying ruler.<sup>118</sup> Clearly, the relic was seen and used as an important symbol of authority and catalyst for the acquisition of power. The same relic was the focal point of imperial rituals celebrated on the day of the beheading of John the Baptist, August 29, at the Studios Monastery, which demonstrated a close link between the Precursor and the imperial office. Additionally, the Studios Monastery was where Michael V attempted to find sanctuary after his unsuccessful coup against Zoe in 1042.<sup>119</sup>

Emperors of the Macedonian Dynasty promoted John the Baptist as a dynastic patron saint particularly actively, as has been shown by Ioli Kalavrezou.<sup>120</sup> Especially prominent were the actions of the sisters' great-grandfather, Constantine VII (r. 945-59), who acquired the saint's right arm in 956 and placed it in a palace church; regular commemoration of this relic was inserted into the liturgical calendar of Constantinople.<sup>121</sup> In 957, the high official Theodore Daphnopates gave an oration celebrating the arm's arrival. This text portrays eloquently the intimate connection between the miracle-working relic and imperial power. Theodore describes the faith the emperor invests in John the Baptist and his remains, and states:

Him (Constantine VII) whom from the womb you have protected by your mediations, him to whom you have granted imperial rule as a paternal inheritance (reference to his legitimation on Epiphany 906), and whom you do not fail to make ever more victorious with the trophies and the victories over his enemies, this man we beseech you to be blessed with Christian perfection for the long passage of time, and that you grant both those born and those still to be born from the fruit of the womb of his line, that they sit now and in the future on the throne of the empire (of kingship).<sup>122</sup>

The passage presents John the Baptist as a powerful intercessor and the protector of the bloodline of the Macedonian emperors, who personally safeguarded Constantine VII "from the womb." This statement glosses over the scandalous circumstances of Constantine's birth, born out of wedlock to Emperor Leo VI.<sup>123</sup> Although Constantine VII was crowned co-emperor during the reign of his father in 908, he was not

able to maintain and exercise power after his father's untimely death in 912 because various parties were clamoring for power; Constantine was only able to establish his sole rule three decades later in 945.<sup>124</sup> Clearly, legitimacy and maintaining the continuity of the dynasty must have been of great concern to him, and he wished to ensure a seamless transfer of power to his own son, Romanos II (r. 959-63), and his offspring. These ideas are lucidly articulated in the homily of Daphnopates, which presents John the Baptist as intercessor and protector of the emperor and guarantor of the peaceful rule of his offspring.

Further associations connected imperial authority with the figure of John the Baptist in Byzantine thought. The historical and ideological connection between the Baptism of Christ and imperial power and peace is found in sources as early as the work of Orosius (ca. 400).<sup>125</sup> Other early Byzantine sources also demonstrate the close connection between Christ's Baptism and imperial power. An early Byzantine homily, attributed to John Chrysostom and delivered at the Feast of the Epiphany, puts the pronouncement of God the Father heard at the time of Christ's Baptism, "This is my beloved son; hear him," into the mouth of an emperor whose son was baptized on the occasion, creating a powerful assimilation between the ruler and his son to God the Father and the Son.<sup>126</sup> The comparison of the baptized Christ with the emperor continued into the Middle Byzantine period: an early tenth-century coin shows the Baptist blessing Alexander (r. 912-13) in a composition that evokes the baptism of Christ and suggests a parallel between imperial coronation and baptismal anointing.<sup>127</sup> Another example is found at the Pigeon House Church at Çavuşin, where the portrait of Nikephoros Phokas (r. 963-69) and the imperial family is placed directly across from the representation of the Baptism of Christ, creating a visual and ideological bond between the ruling emperor and the baptized Christ.<sup>128</sup>

The same idea is also highlighted in the carefully choreographed ceremonials of the Festival of the Epiphany. On the eve of Epiphany the emperor attended the ritual of the Great Blessing of the Waters at a palace church: the patriarch poured blessed water on the emperor's hands, who washed his hands and face in it—ritually evoking the baptism of Christ. The prayers performed in the presence of the emperor terminated with a request of blessings for the ruler. The holy water

produced during this ritual possessed the power to heal and purify the body and soul and also had regenerative qualities as it renewed the benefits of baptismal water.<sup>129</sup> On the day of Epiphany, the emperor went to Hagia Sophia, and after the celebration, he exchanged gifts with the patriarch: the ruler offered a bag of gold and the patriarch presented him with sacred oil (*aleipta*). These ritual actions emphasize the sovereign's divinely endowed power and the strong connections and similarities between the emperor and Christ and between imperial coronation and baptismal anointing.<sup>130</sup> Acclamations chanted during the Feast of the Epiphany reiterated these ideas; it is the baptized Christ who ensures the emperor's sovereignty in these texts.<sup>131</sup> The baptism of Christ by John is directly likened to the appointment and proclamation of the emperor by God through the similarity of their hand gestures which confirm and confer authority: "He who today was baptized through the hand of the Prodomos (Forerunner), proclaims you today emperor with his awesome hand, god-crowned benefactors, and points you out worthy throughout the universe."<sup>132</sup> In another passage the divine protection of the empire is described as a quasi-baptism: "he baptizes the empire with the oil of incorruptibility, giving security to the Romans and the greatest protection and glory of the empire."<sup>133</sup> The assimilation of Christ and the emperor is also found in a twelfth-century poem delivered on the Feast of the Epiphany by Theodore Prodromos, which directly compares the Baptism of Christ to the victorious emperor.<sup>134</sup> By the Middle Byzantine period, the Feast of the Epiphany became the regular occasion when a panegyric was delivered in praise of the emperor, clearly confirming the manifold connections between John the Baptist, the Baptism of Christ, imperial ideology, and *Christomimesis*.<sup>135</sup>

It seems clear that John the Baptist was not only one of the most popular saints in Byzantium but also that he was a figure whose authority was especially closely linked with various aspects of imperial power, including accession to and exercise of power, and was even connected with the facilitation of imperial deaths. The cult of the Baptist became particularly intimately tied up with the authority of the Macedonian emperors.

Consequently, it appears that the representation of John the Baptist

conversing with an empress evokes a number of interlocking references. It is possible that the image alludes to the monastic consecration of the empress and thereby brings to mind Theodora's personal history as well as her restitution to imperial authority. Furthermore, the ideological connection between the emperor and the Baptism of Christ in Byzantine thought accentuates the divinely endowed and Christ-like power of the emperor, which in this case is applied to an empress. According to the most liberal reading, this medallion goes so far as to state that the empress is Christ-like, while, according to a more restricted understanding, it represents her as a companion of John the Baptist. Further, the image positions the empress within the august line of emperors (many of whom were immediate blood relatives of Theodora) who bolstered their power through manifold associations with the Baptist. The discernible links with the realm of the holy and with the history of the Macedonian Dynasty create an eloquent image that portrays the empress as both a member of the heavenly court and as a divinely anointed earthly ruler. Additionally, the representation of the empress in the company of the Baptist also evokes associations with fertility, motherhood, and regeneration, and this layer of meaning is amplified through the pairing of this medallion with the roundel showing the quasi-annunciation scene.

### **A Meaningful Pairing: The Virgin and the Baptist**

The Mother of God and John the Baptist were popular intercessors in Byzantium. Their role as mediator is visualized unmistakably in the so-called *Deesis* (entreaty) iconography, which depicts Christ in the center with the Virgin and the Baptist flanking and petitioning him with extended hands on behalf of the faithful.<sup>136</sup> The Mother of God was also closely linked with imperial ideology.<sup>137</sup> Pentcheva examined her role as protector of imperial heirs developing from the eighth century through the close architectural and conceptual association of three structures within the Great Palace of Constantinople, namely, the imperial birth chamber (Porphyra or Purple Room), a chapel dedicated to the Mother of God (the Pharos), and the adjacent throne room. The Pharos Chapel was where the arm relic of John the Baptist acquired by Constantine VII was most likely kept.<sup>138</sup> Both the throne room and the Pharos were



decorated with a mosaic of the orans Virgin, accentuating her fundamental role as intercessor for the imperial family.<sup>139</sup> It has been suggested that the first appearance of the Virgin (as orant) on Byzantine coins during the reign of Leo VI may have been linked with his concern to ensure the birth of a male heir.<sup>140</sup> Several texts of the Middle Byzantine period attest that the Virgin's assistance was invoked to cure infertility or aid in childbirth. Zoe Karbonopsina (the concubine and eventual fourth wife of Leo VI) is reported to have conceived Constantine VII through the application of a miraculous belt that was formerly tied around an icon of the Mother of God at her church at the Pege. The Virgin was also credited with assisting in the conception of Theophano (first wife of Leo VI) and in the painful and dangerous delivery that her mother underwent. Byzantine women at large sought the aid of the Mother of God to conceive and to facilitate healthy pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>141</sup>

The Virgin and the Baptist were clearly prominent figures in the devotional practices of Byzantine women. Pitarakis noted that John's images are often linked with representations of the Annunciation or the Mother of God in the early Byzantine period to express female concerns related to childbirth and to emphasize the importance of the incarnation.<sup>142</sup> Similar ideas also appear in textual sources. For example, Oration 39 of Gregory Nazianzus (fourth century) on the Baptism of Christ refers to the births and gestations of John and Christ evoking the visitations of Mary and Elizabeth. It describes how John at first refuses to baptize Christ, saying: "I need to be baptized by you," the lamp says to the sun, the voice to the Word, the friend to the bridegroom, the one above all born of women to the first born of all creation, the one who leaped in the womb to the one worshiped in the womb, the one who was and will be the Forerunner to the one who was and will be made manifest."<sup>143</sup> Gregory's well-known text was employed as a liturgical reading during the Feast of the Epiphany, and the association between Baptism and the conception and birth of Christ and the Baptist was a common motif in Byzantine thought. The hymn of Romanos on the Epiphany (sixth century) also reminds the audience of Christ's and John's conceptions and births forging further connections between Baptism, Annunciation, birth, and motherhood.<sup>144</sup> The Baptist addresses Christ:

I know who Thou art, and I am not unaware of what Thou wert,  
for I recognize Thee from Thy mother's womb.  
How, then, should I not recognize Thy appearance now, the One  
Whom I observed hidden in Thy mother's womb, as I  
skipped with joy?<sup>145</sup>

This passage weaves together references to the visitations of Mary and Elizabeth and John's recognition of the Messiah both as an unborn child and as an adult. Later Christ reminds the Baptist of the message delivered to Zachariah announcing the miraculous birth of his son: "I once sent Gabriel on a mission, / And he accomplished it well at the time of your birth. / Then do you send your hand to me as messenger, / In order that it may baptize / The unapproachable light."<sup>146</sup> The paralleling of the annunciation to Zachariah and the Baptism of Christ also brings to mind the Annunciation to the Virgin and the conception of Christ, linking all these events into a closely related cluster of images and concepts. The text also juxtaposes the two protagonists as "the one born of the barren woman" and "the One born of a virgin" to highlight their miraculous conceptions.<sup>147</sup> Later writers also forged connections between the conceptions of Christ and the Baptist.<sup>148</sup>

The Baptist's role as a protector of unborn children and expectant mothers is also evident in the speech of Theodore Daphnopoulos discussed above, which describes the saint as a guardian of the womb of the empress and the health of the imperial family. Clearly, the Baptist's connection with the protection of mothers and childbirth persisted in the Middle Byzantine period. A cameo which combines a sixth- or seventh-century Byzantine Annunciation scene with a Middle Byzantine (ca. 850 to 1025) image of the Deesis carved on its back also demonstrates this. The Deesis is inscribed with an invocation for help: "Mother of God, help your servant, Anna."<sup>149</sup> Although the identity of Anna is unknown, the precious nature of the object suggests an aristocratic patroness. This prophylactic amulet employs the traditional pairing of the Annunciation with a figure of the Baptist, although rather than using his figure alone, the cameo employs a related iconographic type, the Deesis, which became particularly popular in the Middle Byzantine period. The Deesis originally visualized the status of the Virgin and

the Baptist as the earliest witnesses of the divinity of Christ, yet from the tenth century onward the iconography most frequently emphasized their intercessory role, as on this cameo.<sup>150</sup> The pairing of the Annunciation and Deesis on this amulet offers a powerful entreaty on behalf of a woman and hints at the possibility that she was seeking aid in a reproductive problem.

The conceptual connection between the Baptism and the Annunciation is a fundamental tenet in Byzantine thought because both were perceived as (re)generative processes. Andrew of Crete (eighth century), for example describes the Annunciation as a “fresh renewal” and restoration, while Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century) states: “Baptism, then, is a cleansing from sins, a forgiveness of trespasses, a cause of renewal and regeneration.”<sup>151</sup> The concept of regeneration through Baptism is also reiterated, for example, in an acclamation chanted at one of the receptions during the Feast of the Epiphany.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, the pairing of a quasi-Annunciation with an image of the Baptist on the Khakhuli medallions draws on a meaningful and long-standing juxtaposition of visual motifs on works of art associated with women and concerned particularly with successful childbirth, while it also reflects textual rhetoric that highlights the regenerative aspects of both the Annunciation and the Baptism.

Given the associations between the Annunciation, the Mother of God, and John the Baptist, it is conceivable that the medallion representing John the Baptist in the company of an empress is intended to express expectations of providing an heir to the empire in addition to its allusions to imperial ideology explored above. Although Theodora never married and lived as a nun for over a decade, she was clearly invested with hopes for the future of the empire as one of the last living members of the Macedonian Dynasty. The apposition of this medallion with the other that shows a modified Annunciation scene supports this reading, because this pairing appears to have been particularly rife with associations of fertility and was employed in aiding the conception and delivery of healthy offspring. The two medallions complement each other, and their pairing amplifies the message of regeneration.

Even though neither Zoe nor Theodora ever gave birth, contemporary sources indicate that they were widely perceived as Mothers of the

Byzantine people. Psellos recounts the desperate cries of the women of Constantinople during the uprising in the reign of Michael V: “Where can she [Zoe] be, she who alone of all women is free, the mistress of all the imperial family, the rightful heir to the Empire, whose father was emperor, whose grandfather was monarch before him—yes, and great-grandfather too?”<sup>153</sup> This statement underscores the long lineage from which Zoe springs, her lawful right to imperial authority, and describes her as “mistress” [δεσπότης] of all the imperial family. The primary meaning of the title *despotis* is mastery over subjects of the empire, while it also connotes the authority of the head of a household over material goods and members.<sup>154</sup> Because Zoe was legally the adoptive mother of Michael V, he swore an allegiance to uphold the rights of his mother and mistress at the time of his adoption. Therefore, Michael’s uprising was perceived not only as a revolt against imperial authority but also against his own mother and the spiritual and legal bond created by his adoption.<sup>155</sup> Michael’s coup cast Zoe in the role of a violated mother. Zoe’s perception as a mother of the people is also shown by another eleventh-century historian, John Skylitzes, when he reports that a member of the populace cried out during the same event: “We don’t want a cross-trampling caulker for emperor [i.e. Michael V], but the original and hereditary [ruler]: our mother [μητέρα] Zoe.”<sup>156</sup> Skylitzes also recounts another example: on an occasion when Constantine Monomachos (Zoe’s third husband) had shown great favor toward his lover, Skleraina, the people of Constantinople chanted the following: “We do not want Skleraina as empress, nor will our mothers the purple born Zoe and Theodora die because of her.”<sup>157</sup> The sisters, due to their prestigious family history, were cast as mothers of the people in a rhetorical language that clearly drew on motherhood’s association with mutual caring, affection, and nurturing.<sup>158</sup>

The sisters’ privileged position within Byzantium and their perception as mothers of the empire and embodiments of the *genius* of the imperial family were also likely related to their status as purple-born imperial heirs.<sup>159</sup> In analyzing rituals described in the *Book of Ceremonies*, Dagron concluded that “The porphyrogenitus was privileged, in this case, because the whole of the social body was associated in the various ceremonies that followed his birth; the people of Constantinople, the

dignitaries and the army were attached to the child by a tie of adoption which it would be sacrilege to break in case of revolt or violence.”<sup>160</sup> Although most of the chapters in the *Book of Ceremonies* on which Dagron bases his analysis refer to a purple-born son, it is possible that Zoe and Theodora would have received the treatment normally reserved for the male purple-born child in a family that did not have male offspring. Therefore, the perception of Zoe and Theodora as Mothers of the Empire may have been founded upon the elaborate ceremonials in which members of society were ritually bound to the imperial sisters following their births.

The imagery of the medallions reiterates and underscores the sisters’ role in maintaining the health of the empire through their responsibility in facilitating the regeneration of imperial power. Because of the nearly identical representation of the two sisters on the roundels, one is prompted to view their figures as interchangeable, a perception also strengthened by the symmetrical and balanced composition of the three medallions.<sup>161</sup> This suggests that all concepts identified in this analysis apply to both empresses and that together they embody the authority of the imperial house and the regenerative potency of the empire. Yet another motif links the three medallions together, namely the emphatic use of scrolls in the hands of the figures, which may also enhance this reading.

The empress and the archangel hold scrolls on the medallion showing the angelic salutation; both empresses hold scrolls on the double coronation roundel; and John the Baptist presents an unfurled scroll to his companion on the third medallion. It is possible that the prominent visibility of scrolls may be linked with the original function of the object that carried the enamels: it is conceivable that the three medallions decorated a book cover. Scrolls are frequent attributes of imperial figures alluding to both education and divinely endowed wisdom.<sup>162</sup> The scroll as a symbol of divine wisdom and attribute of the ruler also appears in tenth-century works.<sup>163</sup> Belting and Pentcheva explored the visual and textual representations of scrolls conveying the idea of wisdom and divine inspiration in images and texts of the tenth through the early twelfth centuries and the important conceptual associations between the incarnation, the body of the Virgin, Christ Logos, and scrolls.<sup>164</sup>



They drew attention to the textual topos of the Virgin as a scroll or book inscribed with the Wisdom of God to articulate the concept of the incarnation. These ideas, well known in the Middle Byzantine period, may have informed the representations of the Khakhuli medallions. The prominently displayed scrolls on the Khakhuli medallions signify divinely inspired knowledge and wisdom of which the empresses partake, emphasizing their unique position within Byzantine society and their God-given sacred charisma and dominion. Yet the scrolls may also evoke ideas about birth and motherhood, associations linked with the female bodies of the empresses and the Virgin and offering a further tie between the empresses and the Mother of God.

## Conclusion

The three medallions examined here conjure up an unusual view of two empresses as participants wholly integrated into sacred narratives. Scholars have noted a pronounced desire by aristocratic patrons of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to perceive Christian narrative images in a personal and emotional manner that went beyond their role in articulating theological conceptions and serving liturgical functions.<sup>165</sup> The three medallions from the Khakhuli Triptych fit into this trend of personalizing biblical stories; here, however, the visual iconography of the sacred narratives is modified by the substitution of the figures of eleventh-century empresses for the protagonists. The interpolation of Zoe and Theodora into Christological narratives and their representation in the company of saints on the Khakhuli medallions reflect the tendency characterized by Henry Maguire as a permeable mirroring between the heavenly and earthly courts, where members of each realm may infiltrate the others' dominion. Maguire suggests that this type of imagery enhances the prestige of the earthly court and its head by portraying the ruler as "play[ing] the part of God" while also promising him the security of salvation after death.<sup>166</sup> These concepts undoubtedly apply to the imagery of the Khakhuli medallions, which present a fully integrated vision of the heavenly and earthly courts. However, it was not only the imperial court where holy figures were imagined to interact with mortals; in visions saints often manifest their power by appearing,

moving about, and even actively tending to the faithful.<sup>167</sup> Such visions confirm the intercession of the saint and the efficacy of the prayers of the faithful and verify that the Byzantines imagined their lives to be fully intertwined with supernatural forces that occasionally could be witnessed in waking visions or dreams; such interactions, in turn, could be represented in visual images further confirming their validity. The Khakhuli medallions present the imperial women as participants in and witnesses of the hallowed history of Christianity through such visionary images; their presence in the company of holy figures visually confirms the benefits that the empresses receive from the heavenly intercessors.

Modifications to the normative iconography activate in the viewer's mind a comparison between the representation at hand and the standard iconographic type it references; therefore, through a careful manipulation of the visual iconography, the empresses are portrayed as quasi-holy figures, compared to or even identified with the Mother of God and Christ. Such comparison and/or identification serves as a visual panegyric praising the authority and charisma of Zoe and Theodora and justifying their reign. While emperors were regularly described and perceived as imitators of Christ, here empresses are shown as imitators of both Christ and the Mother of God. Although emperors had strong associations with the Mother of God and promoted her cult extensively in the tenth and eleventh centuries, their imagery only associates but does not identify them with the Virgin.<sup>168</sup>

By integrating empresses into Christian narratives, the medallions present the imperial women not only in relation to biblical figures and stories but also in relation to male rulers through the coopting of verbal and visual imagery most frequently and most consistently applied to emperors. The imagery articulates the exceptional, divinely bestowed authority of the sisters while also asserting that this authority is equivalent to that of male rulers. The empresses are shown in representations typical of male imperial visual and textual rhetoric yet with a novel accent: as female rulers they are not restricted by their gender in visual rhetoric—they are shown as imitators of both Christ and his mother. The imagery also alludes to specific predilections of the Macedonian Dynasty embedding the sisters in the long history of the family's imperial tradition exercised by their male predecessors. The medallion

effigies evoke monuments, miraculous objects, and ceremonials closely associated with the sisters' prestigious ancestors to underscore their firm position within the family line and to demonstrate the continuity and vitality of the dynasty. Moreover, the representations also engage the iconography of public portrayals of Zoe's husbands to create an intentional visual dialogue that justifies the authority of the sisters and presents them as lawful sovereigns replacing and eclipsing the emperors who married or were adopted into the imperial office during the last decades of the Macedonian Dynasty.

In addition, the imagery of the medallions emphasizes interests particularly closely associated with women: the juxtaposition of the annunciation-like representation with a scene showing an empress conversing with the Baptist articulates concerns related to procreation, motherhood, and regeneration. Extant evidence suggests that Byzantine women had a particularly strong affinity to the Virgin Annunciate and the Baptist when they were seeking help. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the medallions draw on imagery with such strongly pronounced allusions to feminine concerns, since women took an unmatched role in resisting the rebellion of 1042 that threatened Zoe's power. Psellos reports vividly that women, not normally seen in public places, took to the streets in droves.<sup>169</sup> Women of all classes participated in an unprecedented manner and formed a formidable and active force of opposition against the coup of Michael V, and their participation clearly contributed to the preservation of the power of the sisters. Psellos's rhetorical strategy in presenting this event is twofold. First, he portrays the remarkable reactions of the women of Constantinople by comparing their conduct to extreme examples of female behavioral stereotypes: he first likens the insurgent women to mourners beating their breasts and wailing (a role traditionally assigned to women in Byzantium), thus emphasizing the genuine sense of loss, pain, and outrage associated with the forceful removal of the empress; later, he likens them to Maenads cavorting wildly in order to showcase the women's emboldened and independent actions that clearly thwart the normal code of female behavior based on modesty, relative seclusion, and absence from public affairs.<sup>170</sup> Secondly, he goes on to describe the women as warriors readying for battle and marching to attack, demonstrating that traditional gender

norms were discarded on this extraordinary occasion when a female ruler was dethroned by her adopted son. Psellos's text gives a detailed and memorable account of women's role in this uprising and brings into focus the very fact that the women banded together, in a manner of amazons, in such an unparalleled manner to protect the legal rights of another woman, Mistress and Mother of the Empire, Zoe. It was this same rebellion that also brought Theodora out of monastic retirement and reinstated her in the palace. The traditional iconography normally associated with specific bodily concerns of women in hopes of healthy procreation is employed in a broader sense on the medallions to demonstrate the empresses' role in facilitating the regeneration of imperial rule and dynastic continuity and, therefore, the well-being and strength of the empire. This iconography also underscores the significance of their female gender and positions the empresses in relation to both common women (who expressed their concerns through imagery on which the medallions draw) and the foremost female heavenly authority, the Mother of God (who is depicted as the source of the empresses' authority as well as a figure with whom Zoe and Theodora are visually associated and/or identified). These images present the sisters as mothers of the Byzantine state, despite the fact that neither ever experienced biological motherhood. Yet such a paradox was fully plausible for the Byzantine mind and reflected the broadly prevailing perception of these two exceptional imperial women as figures of maternal authority shared by the populace as a whole.<sup>171</sup> Scholars have noted that mothers were accorded particular authority in Byzantine thought and that they were perceived and represented in Byzantine texts as the dominant figures within the family and household.<sup>172</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising to see these empresses cast in this ideologically significant role: the concept of maternal authority offers a framework to understand and explicate the sisters' role within the Byzantine state and society.

Nevertheless, the striking tension between the sisters' revered position, clearly demonstrated by the popular revolt fought on their behalf, and their nearly complete deficiency of executive power throughout most of their lives has been noted.<sup>173</sup> While Zoe and Theodora embodied imperial charisma and authority as legitimate heirs to the empire, aside from their short joint reign in 1042, Zoe barely exercised imperial

power, and Theodora was only able to rule in her own right briefly after the death of Zoe's last husband at the very end of her own life. For most of their lives, the sisters facilitated access to power: during the lifetimes of their uncle and father, they were potential brides who could transmit imperial power to their future spouses; after the death of their uncle and father, they were figureheads who legitimized through marriage, adoption, and simply by their visible presence the executive power of a male ruler. This is perhaps not surprising, as imperial power in Byzantium was understood as indivisible and exercised by a man.<sup>174</sup> Byzantine law makes an important distinction between the legal position of the emperor and the empress: "the emperor is exempt from the law, but the empress is subject to it, however the emperor bestows on her his own privileges."<sup>175</sup> Therefore, although the empress stood at the apex of Byzantine society forming the feminine "half" of the imperial whole, her power and authority was far more limited than that of the emperor. Empresses normally did not exercise executive power, and when the emperor left Constantinople, it was not the empress but high officials of the administration who became his deputies.<sup>176</sup> However, empresses were essential for the proper running of the imperial court and ceremonials, as noted by an early ninth-century courtier: "It is not proper for an emperor to live without a wife, nor for our wives to be deprived of a mistress and empress."<sup>177</sup> The tightly regimented life of the Byzantine court, which consisted of the regular performance of imperial and religious ceremonials according to strict rules, could not be maintained without the presence of an empress. Additionally, empresses commanded significant authority due to the dynastic principle of imperial power. As regent mothers they could become guardians of the power of an underaged emperor (and thereby safeguards of the dynasty) or could serve as agents of transmitting power.<sup>178</sup> Empresses clearly also exercised a certain amount of influence over their imperial husbands or sons and could serve as intercessors to advance causes or to facilitate communication with the ruler on occasion.<sup>179</sup> Yet, even Zoe and Theodora who were regarded as rightful heirs to the empire on account of their indisputably imperial blood going back several generations, were not perceived as fully qualified to hold executive power.<sup>180</sup> Their short reign in 1042 was presented as an exception to the norm in textual sources of



the period. Psellos, for example, offers a somewhat ambiguous picture of their reign. While he acknowledges that they conducted the affairs of the state as customary and notes that the civilian and military segments of the population lived in harmony, he ultimately concludes that the sisters were not fit to rule and that a man was needed at the helm of the empire.<sup>181</sup>

However, contrary to the textual record, the medallions analyzed here offer an example of the visual propaganda that bolstered the authority of the sisters during their independent reign and showed them as legitimate rulers in their own right. The representation of the sisters as recipients of various communications and blessings from holy figures validates and reveals their authority emphatically: they are portrayed as holders of executive power rather than as agents who simply facilitate the transmission of executive power. The imagery of the medallions is highly effective because it is tightly embedded in the well-known visual tradition of Byzantine imperial and religious iconography yet with meaningful modifications. Because Byzantine viewers were used to a rather limited range in visual images, small variations to standard iconography would have been meaningful and easily recognized.<sup>182</sup>

The simple, yet highly evocative representations on the medallions would have allowed a Byzantine viewer from the circle of the court to recognize wide-ranging allusions in the imagery to liturgical, dynastic, and political matters of the mid eleventh century. While it remains unclear who commissioned the original work to which the medallions belonged and what this object could have been, it seems likely that it would have been a prestigious article, such as a book cover or icon frame, and that it would have had a restricted audience. This audience most likely comprised members of the court who were familiar with the imagery of other luxury objects produced for the Macedonian Dynasty as well as images on coins and in the public sphere and would also have been acquainted with recent events in Constantinople. For such a viewer in the know, the imagery would have conjured up a series of complex, interlocking messages. In the absence of inscriptions it is unclear exactly how the interactions depicted on the medallions should be understood and how the imagery may have been intended to mediate a relationship between the commissioner and the recipient of the object.<sup>183</sup> Examples

of dedicatory illuminations from eleventh-century manuscripts from the sphere of the court offer parallels to the use of luxury objects in facilitating intercessions of various kinds. Such representations demonstrate that the imagery of the medallions could have been assigned agency in various ways. The illuminated pages from Codex Sinai gr. 364 offer examples where holy figures are entreated either directly or through their intercession on behalf of the imperial triad of Zoe, Theodora, and Constantine Monomachos.<sup>184</sup> These pages request blessings and protection for the imperial figures but without mentioning a patron and his/her motivations. Another manuscript, Paris Coislin 79, associated with the emperor Michael VII, but later rededicated to his successor, Nikephoros Botaniates (r. 1078-81), includes four pages with imperial portraits. The inscriptions on f. 1(2bis)r and f. 2r praise the emperor and plead directly with him for reward and sympathy for the scribe, or the illuminator of the manuscript, while the text on f. 1(2bis)v requests the protection of Christ for the imperial couple but does not mention the scribe. The fourth page (f. 2v), which portrays the emperor accompanied by John Chrysostom and Archangel Michael and a tiny prostrate figure of the scribe, proffers a different type of appeal. Here the archangel and the saint intercede with the emperor to seek his benevolence towards the scribe.<sup>185</sup> This manuscript, clearly intended as a gift for the emperor, presents three examples of how a patron may employ a precious gift to address the ruler: by directly addressing the emperor and requesting benefits; by wishing for the protection of Christ on behalf of the emperor but without naming himself; and by entreating holy figures to intercede with the emperor on the patron's behalf.<sup>186</sup> These examples open up multiple potential readings for the imagery of the medallions and suggest various possible paths of intercessory requests; these may include the request of blessings for the empresses from holy powers, the intercession of saints with the empresses on behalf of the patron, and a direct plea to the empresses by the patron. While it is not possible to reconstruct the exact manner in which this object would have operated, it seems plausible that it could have been invested with significance that is similar to the manuscripts mentioned above, requesting divine protection for the empresses and possibly even a reciprocal favor for the patron.

The imagery of the medallions summons an intricate network of

references. On the most general level, the representations propound the divinely endowed power of the empresses who are shown as exercising authority with the active help of the Mother of God, John the Baptist, and Gabriel. A second layer of meaning reminds the viewer that the court of the sisters is a reflection of the heavenly court and that Zoe and Theodora are similes of the Mother of God and Christ, and that they participate in or bear witness to the history of the incarnation. A third, related layer of meaning showcases the sisters as members of the Macedonian imperial dynasty who cultivate the memory and customs of their predecessors and asserts that the empresses hold power in the same manner as their forefathers did, with the full legitimacy of their bloodline and imperial education behind them.<sup>187</sup> This further intimates their superiority over rulers to whom imperial power was transferred through Zoe's legitimizing authority. A fourth layer of meaning contains topical references to the historical events that led to Zoe's and Theodora's joint rule and that took place during their imperial tenure, and would have allowed a well-informed viewer to perceive allusions to the monastic banishment of the sisters, their ultimate victory over Michael V, and the celebration of the Ascension and Pentecost during their reign. The final layer of meaning emphasizes specifically feminine concerns bringing to mind the role of women in reinforcing the sisters' hold on imperial power and emphatically presenting the empresses as female rulers who hold executive power with full legitimacy and with the support of both heavenly and earthly forces.

Three primary concerns underpin the imagery of the medallions: imperial ideology, dynastic thinking, and perceptions of gender. The examination of the three medallions offers a unique glimpse into the processes that shaped the creation of the imagery for two women exercising executive power. It shows how the sisters (or their image makers) transformed traditional imperial imagery to be used by female rulers. The empresses contested the traditionally defined gender roles embedded in Byzantine imperial ideology by taking the reins of the empire (even if briefly), and the imagery of the medallions emphatically underscores their female gender identity through the showcasing of five female figures on the three medallions and through the emphatic connections forged with the Mother of God. However, the imagery does not stop at

merely comparing the sisters to the most powerful female figure of the heavenly court. Because it was customary to compare the emperor to the baptized Christ, such a comparison or identification is now applied to governing women by crossing the boundaries between the genders: Zoe and Theodora are not only likened to and identified with the Mother of God but also with Christ.<sup>188</sup> This is indeed a bold statement in Byzantine visual rhetoric: it shatters the traditional definition of emperor and empress and conflates the two to enunciate the position commanded by the sisters. They are presented as rulers who are like both the Virgin and Christ. While *Christomimesis* applied to an empress appears startling at first glance, such a comparison is informed by traditional Byzantine views on gender—when praise is bestowed upon a woman, this is often done through the rhetoric of masculinization.<sup>189</sup> A comparison of an empress to Christ and male imperial predecessors through visual allusions fits into this type of rhetoric. The simultaneous paralleling of the empresses to both the Virgin and Christ has a further effect: it nullifies the significance of (or the perceived impediments inherent in) the sisters' gender. This is an appropriate presentation of two empresses with exceptional life stories that did not fit neatly into the normal life cycle and definition of womanhood in Byzantium. Neither of them married at a young age (Theodora, in fact, never married), they did not bear children, and did not have customary maternal responsibilities in the imperial household. Yet, as the last scions of the illustrious Macedonian Dynasty, they emerged as luminous repositories of imperial authority and were perceived as Mothers of all Byzantines.

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## Abbreviation of frequently cited sources:

*De Cer.*: Constantinus VII Porphyrogenitus. *De ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae libri duo*. Edited by Johann Jacob Reiske. 2 vols. Bonn, 1829–30.

*DOC*: Philip Grierson. *Catalogue of Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and Whittemore Collection*, vol. 3: pts.1–2. Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1973.

*ODB*: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Edited by Alexander Kazhdan. 3 vols. Oxford University Press, 1991.

*PG*: J.-P. Migne, ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graecae*. Paris, 1857–66

## END NOTES

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The Khakhuli Triptych, which measures 2.02 m × 1.47 m (78.75" × 57.875"), is preserved at the Georgian National Museum, Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts in Tbilisi; see Shalva Amiranashvili, *Medieval Georgian Enamels of Russia* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1971), 93; Titos Papamastorakis,

“Re-Deconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych,” *Deltion tes christianikes archaiologikes betaireias* 23 (2002): 225-54, esp. 226. Papamastorakis provides further bibliography on the triptych. Additionally, see Wachtang Zizischwili, “El Icono de Jajuli,” *Archivo español de arte* 24 (1951): 11-33; Wachtang Dchobadze-Zizichvili, “Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli,” *Archivo español de arte* 25 (1952): 25-51; Johanna Flemming, “Das Triptychon der Muttergottes von Chachuli, seine Ikonographie und seine staatspolitische Bedeutung,” *Georgica* 4 (1981): 41-48; Johanna Flemming, “Byzantinische Goldemails am Triptychon von Chachuli,” *Georgica* 5 (1982): 76-78; Johanna Flemming, “Goldzellenemails aus der Zeit Davids des Erbauers und seines Sohnes Demetre,” *Georgica* 6 (1983): 79-84; Paul Hetherington, “Byzantine Cloisonné Enamel: Production, Survival and Loss,” *Byzantion* 76 (2006): 185-215, esp. 200-207 (reprinted in Paul Hetherington, *Enamels, Crowns, Relics and Icons: Studies on Luxury Arts in Byzantium*, Variorum Collected Studies; CS908 [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008]).

2. N. P. Kondakov, *Geschichte und Denkmäler des byzantinischen Emails* (Frankfurt am Main, 1892), 141; Flemming, “Das Triptychon der Muttergottes von Chachuli,” 44.

3. Dchobadze-Zizichwili’s observation that the roundels were possibly produced for the Khakhuli Triptych must be rejected; see Dchobadze-Zizichwili, “Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli,” 49. Inscriptions are essential components of Middle Byzantine artworks and their absence requires explanation, see Paul Hetherington, “Byzantine Enamels for a Russian Prince: The Book-Cover of the Gospels of Mstislav,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 59 (1996): 309-24, esp. 318 (reprinted in Hetherington, *Enamels, Crowns, Relics and Icons*). There is an example of an enamel deliberately cut to fit it into a particular shape and iconographic context at the base of the triptych where a plaque showing the Virgin was clearly excised from an Annunciation scene, see Leila Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels at the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts* (Tbilisi: Xelovneba, 1984), no. 65, 57.

4. Hetherington confirms that most roundels were about 3-6 cm in size, see Hetherington, *Enamels, Crowns, Relics and Icons*.

5. For the Khakhuli Triptych at Gelati, see Kondakov, *Geschichte und Denkmäler des byzantinischen Emails*, 135-36; Rusudan Kenia, *Khakhulis Khvtismšoblis Khat’is K’azedis modžediloba* [Repoussé decoration of the Khakhuli Triptych Icon of the Virgin], in Georgian with Russian and French summaries (Tbilisi: Bamomeemloba Mecniereba, 1972), 107. For the church at Gelati, see Adriano Alpago-Novello, Vahtang Beridze, Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Art and Architecture in Medieval Georgia*



(Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut supérieur d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art, Collège Érasme, 1980), 92-93; Jevgenij Derlemenko, Eduard Gigilashvili, Rusudan Mepisashvili, Tinatin Virsaladze, *Gelati: arkhitektura, mozaika, freski* (Tbilisi: Khelovneba, 1982).

6. Amiranashvili dates the triptych to the reign of Demetre, see Shalva Amiranashvili, *The Khakhuli Triptych* (Tbilisi, 1972, no pagination); Abramishvili dates most of the work on the triptych to the reign of Demetre; see Guram Abramishvili, *Chachulskij triptich, The Khakhuli Triptych, Le triptyque de Chachouli, Das Triptychon von Chachuli* (Tbilisi: Xelovneba, 1988, no pagination). Khuskivadze assigns the triptych to the first half of the twelfth century; Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels*, 20. Flemming believes that the triptych was executed during the reign of Davit but after Demetre's elevation as co-ruler, thus some time between 1117/1124 (the exact date of Demetre's elevation is uncertain) and Davit's death in 1125; see Johanna Flemming, "Das Triptychon von Chachuli: Ein Zeugnis der Kunstpolitik Davids der Erbauers," in *IV mezhdunarodnyi simpozium po gruzinskomu iskusstvu: Sbornik dokladov, Tbilisi, 1983, 23.05-2.06=IVe Symposium International sur l'art géorgien*, vol. 1 (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1989), 525-40, esp. 527; also see Flemming, "Das Triptychon der Muttergottes von Chachuli," 47. Papamastorakis dates the assembly of the triptych to 1125-30 in "Re-Deconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych," 228.

7. See *ibid.*, 228, 246-49. However, Papamastorakis does not include the three empress medallions in his analysis; for the purchase of enamels, see Hetherington, "Byzantine Enamels for a Russian Prince," 320-21.

8. I am completing a separate article that examines the role of the three medallions within the imagery of the Khakhuli Triptych.

9. For purple-born or *porphyrogennetos* (imperial offspring born in the Purple Room of the imperial palace), see *ODB* 3:1701 and Gilbert Dagron, "Nés dans la pourpre," *Travaux et mémoires/Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance* 12 (1994): 105-42.

10. Flemming, "Byzantinische Goldemails am Triptychon von Chachuli," 7, also suggested this date for the roundels, although without supporting evidence.

11. See Kondakov, *Geschichte und Denkmäler des byzantinischen Emails*, 140-41. Dalton also identified the figures of the double coronation medallion as a queen and king, see Ormonde Maddock Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1961), 529. For Tamar, see *ODB* 3:2008-9.

12. Dimitrij Gordeev, "K voprosu o razgruppirovanii emalej Chachul'skogo skladnja" [Regarding the question of classifying the enamels of the Khakhuli Triptych], *Mistestvoznastvo Zbirnik*, 1 (Harkov, 1928), 147-65, 157. I am grateful to Mary Clare Altenhofen of the Fine Arts Library at Harvard University for kindly providing me a copy of this article.

13. For a Georgian origin of the medallions, see Dchobadze- Zizichwili, "Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli," 49-51; Amiranashvili, *Khakhuli Triptych*, text next to figs. 101-3; Leila Khuskivadze, *Gruzinskie emali* (Tbilisi: Metniereba, 1981), 91-92; Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels*, 59-60; Nora Mikeladze, "Świeckie postacie historyczne na emaliowanych medalionach z Tryptyku Chachul'skiego" [Historical figures in the enamelled medallions of the Chachuli Triptych], *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 49, no. 4 (2001): 395-404, esp. 404. For a Byzantine origin of the roundels, see Gordeev, "K voprosu o razgruppupirovanii emalej Chachul'skovo skladnja," 157; Flemming, "Das Triptychon der Muttergottes von Chachuli," 44-45; Flemming, "Byzantinische Goldemails am Triptychon von Chachuli," 77; Avtandil Mikaberidze, "Die byzantinische Kaiserin Maria-Martha in Lichte neuer archäologischer Ausgrabungen," in *Byzantinische Malerei, Bildprogramme—Ikonographie—Stil*, ed. Guntram Koch (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000), 183-210, 197, 201. Kiss intimated the possibility that the three medallions were produced in a workshop in the Byzantine capital in "Új eredmények a Monomachos-korona kutatásában?" [New research results regarding the Monomachos Crown?] *Folia Archaeologica* 46 (1997): 125-64, esp. 140, 152-53 and "The State of Research on the Monomachos Crown and Some Further Thoughts," in *Perceptions of Byzantium and Its Neighbors (843-1261)*, ed. Olenka Z. Plevny (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000; dist. Yale University Press), 60-83, esp. 68-69, 80n58. However, ultimately Kiss remained undecided whether the medallions are Byzantine or Georgian products; see *ibid.*, fig. 8.

14. Amiranashvili proposed a date in the 1030s for the double coronation medallion and the first half of the eleventh century for the medallion showing the encounter of the empress and the angel noting that there was no significant chronological divergence between the three roundels; see Amiranashvili, *Khakhuli Triptych*, text next to figs. 101-3. Khuskivadze suggested a date in the eleventh century and noted the medallions' stylistic connection with other datable enameled works, such as the Holy Crown of Hungary (1070s); see Khuskivadze, *Gruzinskie emali*, 89-92, and Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels*, 59-60; Mikeladze argued for a date in the first half of the eleventh century, see Mikeladze,

“Świeckie postacie historyczne na emaliowanych medalionach z Tryptyku Chachulskiego,” 404; Flemming dated them to 1028 or 1042, see Flemming, “Das Triptychon der Muttergottes von Chachuli,” 45, but in a later article, “Byzantinische Goldemails am Triptychon von Chachuli,” 77, assigned them to 1042; Mikaberidze dated them to ca. 1071, see Mikaberidze, “Die byzantinische Kaiserin Maria-Martha,” 197. Kiss also argued for an eleventh century date, see Kiss, “The State of Research on the Monomachos Crown,” 68–69. The only twentieth-century scholar who proposed a date in the early twelfth century or later is Dchobadze-Zizichwili, “Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli,” 49–51.

15. Kiss, “Új eredmények a Monomachos-korona kutatásában?” 140; Kiss, “The State of Research on the Monomachos Crown,” 68–69. However, it must be noted that the authenticity of the Monomachos Crown had been questioned, see Nicolas Oikonomides, “La couronne dite de Constantin Monomaque,” *Travaux et mémoires* 12 (1994), 241–62. Kiss’s articles cited in this note offer a systematic rebuttal of this view, establishing firmly that the Monomachos Crown is an authentic Byzantine work of the eleventh century. For a recent interpretation of the Monomachos Crown as a ceremonial armband, see Timothy Dawson, “The Monomachos Crown: Towards a Resolution,” *Byzantina Symmeikta* 19 (2009): 183–93.

16. The Khakhuli roundels are ca. 5 cm in height, while the panels showing the empresses on the Monomachos Crown are about twice as large, 10.5 and 10.7 cm tall. For the *loros*, see *ODB* 2:1251–52; Maria G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th–15th Centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 18–27; Jennifer L. Ball, *Byzantine Dress: Representations of Secular Dress in Eighth- to Twelfth-Century Painting* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11–29.

17. Redford described the shifting gaze as a characteristic feature of Georgian enamels; see Scott Redford, “How Islamic Is It? The Innsbruck Plate and Its Setting,” *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 119–35, esp. 130. For a discussion of the significance of sidelong glances on Byzantine artworks, see Ioli Kalavrezou, “Irregular Marriages in the Eleventh Century and the Zoe and Constantine Mosaic in Hagia Sophia,” in *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth–Twelfth Centuries*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou and Dieter Simon (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Center and Library, 1994), 241–59.

18. Mario Carrieri, David Buckton, Christopher Entwistle, Rowena Prior, *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan: Olivetti, 1984), 148–51; Cecily J. Hilsdale, “The Social Life of the Byzantine Gift: The Royal Crown of

Hungary Re-invented,” *Art History* 31, no.5 (2008): 603-31. Further examples of emphatic sidelong glances can be found in Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom, eds., *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997).

19. Maria’s footstool is nearly completely covered by the frame; therefore its decoration cannot be ascertained.

20. Amiranashvili identifies the figures of the double coronation as Helena and her mother-in-law Mariam, the empress encountering the angel as Mariam, and the empress discoursing with the Baptist as Maria of Alania; see Amiranashvili, *The Khakhuli Triptych*, text next to figs. 101-3. Abramishvili suggested that the medallions depict Mariam and Maria of Alania; see Guram Abramishvili, “Georgian Jewellery and Metalwork in the Middle Ages,” in Alexander Javakhishvili and Guram Abramishvili, *Jewellery & Metalwork in the Museums of Georgia* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1986), 98-111, esp. 107. Mikaberidze proposed that Maria of Alania and her mother, queen Borena, or possibly her grandmother, Mariam, are represented on the double coronation roundel and Maria of Alania is shown on the other two medallions, see Mikaberidze, “Die byzantinische Kaiserin Maria-Martha,” 197-98. Khuskivadze questioned Amiranashvili’s identification but refrained from identifying the figures due to the absence of inscriptions, Khuskivadze, *Gruzinskie emali*, 92.

21. Dchobadze-Zizichwili, “Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli,” 49; Flemming, “Das Triptychon der Muttergottes von Chachuli,” 44-45; Flemming, “Byzantinische Goldemails am Triptychon von Chachuli,” 77.

22. Mikeladze, “Świeckie postacie historyczne na emaliowanych medalionach z Tryptyku Chachulskiego,” 402-4; Dchobadze-Zizichwili, “Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli,” 49, proposed that the figures show either the empresses Zoe and Theodora or female saints.

23. Theodora was also shown with a kite-shaped fold decorated with a cross on her coins issued in 1055-56, see *DOC* 3:2, Plate LXII, 1a.4-1.d. The fold of the *loros* of empress Maria of Antioch on f. II in Vatican Gr. 1176, dated to 1166, is also decorated with a cross, see Claude Mutafian, ed., *Roma-Armenia* (Rome: De Luca, 1999), 112-13.

24. For recent discussions of Zoe and Theodora, see Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204* (London: Routledge, 1999), 136-67, 272-78; Barbara Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025-1204—Power, Patronage and Ideology* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 1999), 42-58. Zoe and Theodora did have another sister, Eudokia,

who retired to a monastery at a young age and was not groomed as a figure of authority; see n. 31 below. For Zoe's role in transferring imperial power, see Barbara Hill, Liz James, and Dion Smythe, "Zoe: The Rhythm Method of Imperial Renewal," in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994), 215–29. Numerous other Byzantine empresses served as agents of transferring imperial power before Zoe's time; see Dagron, "Nés dans la pourpre," 137; Judith Herrin, "The Imperial Feminine," *Past and Present*, no. 169 (2000): 3–35, esp. 19–23.

25. Zoe died in 1050; see *ODB* 3:2228. When Theodora was dying, she nominated Michael VI (r. 1056–57) as her follower; *ibid.*, 2038.

26. For Zoe's speech and the uprising on her behalf and Theodora's reinstatement, see Michel Psellos, *Chronographie, ou, Histoire d'un siècle de Byzance: 976–1077*, ed. Emile Renauld, 2 vols. (Paris: Belles lettres, 1967), 1:99, 102, 107–9; Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The Chronographia of Michael Psellus*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), 135, 138–39, 142–44.

27. *DOC* 3:2, 731–32, Plate LVIII; Bissera V. Pentcheva, "Rhetorical Images of the Virgin: The Icon of the 'Usual Miracle' at the Blachernai," *RES: Journal for Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38 (2000): 34–55, fig. 1.

28. Also noted by Mikaberidze, "Die byzantinische Kaiserin Maria-Martha," 197, and Flemming, "Das Triptychon der Muttergottes von Chachuli," 44.

29. Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:116, 118; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 151, 156. For other examples of hierarchy between the sisters, see Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:107; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 142.

30. For the visual expression of hierarchy on coins, see *DOC* 3:1, 110–11.

31. For Eudokia's withdrawal from the court and her death before April 1042, see Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:28, 106–7; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 56, 142. For Skleriana, see Nicolas Oikonomides, "St. George of Mangana, Maria Skleraina, and the 'Malyj Sion' of Novgorod," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34/35 (1980–81): 239–46. For the Georgian princess, see Psellos, *Chronographie*, 2:45–47; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 235–37.

32. For the iconography of the double coronation, see Kriszta Kotsis, "Your Body, O Empress, Is a Treasure of Marvelous Qualities"—Representations of Middle Byzantine Empresses (780–1081)" (PhD diss., University of Washington, Seattle, 2004), 225–30. The iconography of the double coronation was also used occasionally for representations of David's marriage and for pairs of saints; see Ioli Kalavrezou, Nicolette Trahoulia,

and Shalom Sabar, "Critique of the Emperor in the Vatican Psalter gr. 752," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993): 195-219, figs. 16, 18; Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, nos. 132, 178.

33. Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 221; for the Greek text, see "Iohannis Euchaitorum metropolitae quae in codice Vaticano graeco 676 supersunt," ed. P. de Lagarde, *Abhandlungen der Historisch-Philologischen Classe der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* 28 (1882), no. 80, 39; PG 120, no.79, col. 1179.

34. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 565n5.

35. Maria G. Parani, "The Romanos Ivory and the New Tokali Kilise: Imperial Costume as a Tool for Dating Byzantine Art," *Cahiers archéologiques* 49 (2001): 15-28.

36. Flemming speculated that the roundels were sent by the sisters to announce their joint rule to the Georgian King, Bagarat IV (r. 1027-72), since Zoe was related to him by marriage through her first husband (Romanos III) whose niece was Bagarat's wife (Flemming incorrectly identified Zoe's husband as Romanos IV); see Flemming, "Byzantinische Goldemails am Triptychon von Chachuli," 77. Amiranashvili linked the roundels showing the double coronation and the quasi-annunciation with Queen Mariam's diplomatic mission to Constantinople which resulted in the marriage of the Byzantine Helena to her son and associated the medallion depicting the Baptist with Empress Maria's (Georgian wife of the Byzantine emperor, Michael VII) expulsion from the court of Constantinople and her retirement as a nun, see Amiranashvili, *The Khakhuli Triptych*, text next to figs. 102-3. Mikaberidze also noted that during the visit of Empress Maria to her dying father in 1072 the enamels could have been sent to the Georgian court as diplomatic gifts, see Mikaberidze, "Die byzantinische Kaiserin Maria-Martha," 197-98.

37. While representations of the empresses could have articulated hopes for imperial succession during the reigns of their uncle or father in the absence of male heirs, the strong visual references of the medallions to the numismatic types of Zoe's first and second husbands (explored below) and the lack of a male imperial figure on the medallions make it unlikely that the enamels were produced during this period. It also seems doubtful that the roundels were produced during the reigns of Zoe's first or second husbands, Romanos III and Michael IV, or her adopted son, Michael V because these



emperors were focused primarily on the promotion of their own authority. The extant images from their reigns either exclude the empresses or include only Zoe: for example, the coins and seals of Romanos III and Michael IV which do not include representations of the empresses; see *DOC* 3.2, 711-26, Plates LVI-LVIII; G. Zacos and A. Vegliery, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (Basel, 1972), vol. 1, pt. 1, 70-71, and the mosaic on the south gallery of Hagia Sophia that originally showed Zoe with her first or second husband, see Natalia Teteriatnikov, "Hagia Sophia: The Two Portraits of the Emperors with Moneybags as a Functional Setting," *Arte medievale*, 2nd ser., 10, no. 1 (1996): 47-68. It is also unlikely that the medallions were produced during Theodora's sole reign in 1055-56. On surviving images Theodora is shown as a single sovereign figure without the inclusion of her sister who was already deceased, see *DOC* 3.2, 748-53, Plate LXII; Philip Grierson, "Byzantine Gold Bullae, With a Catalogue of Those at Dumbarton Oaks," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 239-53, esp. 244-45, 249-50, fig. 3.

38. For the imperial portrait on f. 3r of Sinai gr. 364, see Iohannis Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 100. However, Zoe and Theodora were not included on the coins of Monomachos, see *DOC* 3.2, 733-47, Plates LVIII-LIX. The mosaic panel at Hagia Sophia produced during Zoe's first or second husband's reign was modified during Monomachos's reign to show Zoe with her new husband, see previous note.

39. For the defeat of Maniakes, see Psellos, *Chronographie*, 2:7 and Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 198-99; for Mauropous's letter, see Apostolos D. Karpozilos, *The Letters of Ioannes Mauropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita* (Thessalonike: Association for Byzantine Research, 1990), 106-7 (lines 78-81), 222; for Mauropous's poem, see *Iohannis Euchaitorum metropolitae*, ed. J. Bollig and P. de Lagarde (Gottingen, 1882), 28-33; *PG* 120, no. 53-54, col. 1164-70; for Italian translation, see John, Mauropus, Metropolitan of Euchaita, *Canzoniere*, trans. Rosario Anastasi (Catania: Facoltà di lettere e filosofia, Università di Catania), 1984, nos. 54-55, pp. 41-46.

40. See Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:127; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 165, who reported that the sisters did not participate in the governance of the empire after the accession of Monomachos.

41. This is a general rule for the Middle Byzantine period in representations of empresses. The only empresses portrayed without imperial colleagues in surviving images are women who ruled in their own right, namely Irene (r. 797-802), Zoe (r. 1042), and Theodora (r. 1042, 1055-56).

Otherwise, all surviving images of empress also show other imperial figures, such as the emperor and/or imperial children.

42. For the uprising, see Milton V. Anastos, "Vox Populi Voluntas Dei and the Election of the Byzantine Emperor," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, Part 2: *Early Christianity*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity; vol. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 181-207, esp. 196-98; and Lynda Garland, "Political Power and the Populace in Byzantium Prior to the Fourth Crusade," *Byzantinoslavica* 53 (1992): 17-52, esp. 22-25.

43. Three festivals in May commemorate imperial predecessors and their foundations: the consecration of the Nea Ekklesia (or New Church) founded by Basil I on 1 May; the inauguration of Constantinople on 11 May; and the feast of Constantine and Helena on 21 May. Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 204-11; Nicolas Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1972), 214-15; Gilbert Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451*, 2nd ed., Bibliothèque byzantine. Etudes 7 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984), 37-42, all provide references to primary sources.

44. Easter fell on 11 April in 1042, see Heinrich Mädlar, *Theodora, Michael Stratiotikos, Isaak Komnenos: Ein Stück byzantinischer Kaisergeschichte* (Plauen i V., 1894), 3, with references to the original sources. For the Ascension, see *ODB* 1:203; *De Cer.*, I:54-58; Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *Le livre des cérémonies*, t. 1: *Livre 1, chapitres 1-46 (37)* [Texte et trad.], ed. Albert Vogt (Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles lettres," 1935), 50-53; Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance*, 212; Juan Mateos, ed. and trans., *Le Typicon de la Grand Église. Ms. Sainte-Croix no. 40, X<sup>e</sup> siècle*, t. 2, *Le cycle des fêtes mobiles*, *Orientalia Christiana analecta* 165-166 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1962-63), 126-29.

45. *De Cer.*, 1:59; Vogt, *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:54; for English translation, see Kathleen Corrigan, "The Ivory Scepter of Leo VI: A Statement of Post-Iconoclastic Imperial Ideology," *Art Bulletin* 60 (1978): 407-16, esp. 411. For Pentecost, see *ODB* 3:1626-27; *De Cer.*, 1:58-71; Vogt, *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:54-64; Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance*, 212; Mateos, *Typicon*, 2:136-39.

46. See *De Cer.*, 1:59-60; Vogt, *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:55; Corrigan, "The Ivory Scepter of Leo IV," 410-12.

47. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance*, 212n245; *DOC* 3.2, 507-8.

48. Corrigan, "The Ivory Scepter of Leo IV," 412.

49. Mateos, *Typicon*, 2:128-29, 138-39. It is noteworthy that the Church of the Virgin of the Pege, where the emperors celebrated the Feast of the Ascension, had a monumental image of the Pentecost; see Leslie Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 240.

50. John Cotsonis, "Narrative Scenes on Byzantine Lead Seals (Sixth-Twelfth Centuries): Frequency, Iconography, and Clientele," *Gesta* 48, no. 1 (2009): 55-86, esp. 67; Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 116-18.

51. The size of the medallion is 5 × 4.4 cm; see Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels*, no. 68, p. 59; Dchobadze-Zizichwili, "Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli," no. 94, p. 49. The composition is uncomfortably crammed into the available visual space, indicating that most likely the sides of the original roundel have been cut off; the feet of both empresses are damaged and their haloes appear incomplete because the frame overlaps them.

52. Similar flap-like prependulia are shown on the panel representing Constantine Monomachos and Zoe on the south gallery of Hagia Sophia or the eleventh-century enamel plaque showing the Mother of God holding a crown on the Khakhuli Triptych, see Teteriatnikov, "The Two Portraits of the Emperors"; Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels*, no. 57, p. 53. Although Khuskivadze maintained that the red flaps on the medallions represent a type of headcover worn by Georgian women, called the *mandili*, this seems unlikely, see *ibid.*, 60. Kiss, "The State of Research on the Monomachos Crown," 80n58, questions the Georgian origin of this motif.

53. Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "Two Images of the Virgin in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 14 (1960): 70-86, esp. 72, 74-75; Cyril Mango, "Constantinople as Theotokoupolis," in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira Editore, 2000), 17-25. Also see, Ioli Kalavrezou, "Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became *Meter Theou*," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 165-72, who shows that the promotion of the maternal side of the Virgin is related to the emphasis of iconophile theologians on the human nature of Christ, an argument developed in defense of icons during the Iconoclastic Controversy (726-843).

54. For discussion and illustrations of the mosaic, see Robin Cormack, "The Mother of God in the Mosaics of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople,"

in *Mother of God*, ed. Vassilaki, 106–23, figs. 60–61. For the entrance used by emperors to enter Hagia Sophia during the coronation ceremony and major dominical festivals, see George Majeska, “The Emperor in His Church: Imperial Ritual in the Church of St. Sophia,” in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997), 1–11, esp. 2, 5.

55. For the iconography of imperial investiture, see André Grabar, *L’empereur dans l’art Byzantin: recherches sur l’art officiel de l’empire d’Orient*, Publications de la Faculté des lettres de l’Université de Strasbourg, fasc. 75 (Paris: Belles lettres, 1936), 112–24; Klaus Wessel, “Kaiserbild,” in *Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. Klaus Wessel and Marcell Restle (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1963), Bd. 3, cols. 722–853, esp. cols. 745–58.

56. See for example, Grabar, *L’empereur dans l’art Byzantin*, 118–20; Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, “Eudokia Makrembolitissa and the Romanos Ivory,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977): 305–25; also see Wessel, “Kaiserbild,” cols. 747 and 755–56.

57. For the importance of benediction in these images, see Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson, “The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982): 123–83, esp. 140. The idea of marriage is central to this iconography on the David Casket according to Wessel, “Kaiserbild,” cols. 755–56; also see Anthony Cutler and Nicolas Oikonomides, “An Imperial Byzantine Casket and Its Fate at a Humanist’s Hands,” *Art Bulletin* 70 (1988): 77–87, esp. 83–85; Christopher Walter, “Marriage Crowns in Byzantine Iconography,” *Zograf* 10 (1979): 83–91, (reprinted in Christopher Walter, *Prayer and Power in Byzantine and Papal Imagery*, Variorum Collected Studies Series; CS396 [Aldershot: Ashgate, 1993]).

58. Kotsis, “Representations of Middle Byzantine Empresses,” 225–30. Acclamations performed during imperial ceremonials presented ideas about the exalted position of the empress similar to what we see in imperial double coronation images; see *De Cer.*, 1:198; Vogt, *Livre des cérémonies*, t. 2:7.

59. Kalavrezou, “Irregular Marriages in the Eleventh Century and the Zoe and Constantine Mosaic in Hagia Sophia” and Maria G. Parani, “Byzantine Bridal Costume,” in *Dōrema: A Tribute to the A. G. Leventis Foundation on the Occasion of its 20th Anniversary* (Nicosia: A. G. Leventis Foundation, 2000), 185–216, esp. 199, emphasize the symbolic nature of the images.

60. For the animosity and jealousy between the sisters, see Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 51–52; Lynda Garland, “Political Power and the

Populace in Byzantium,” 17–51, esp. 23; Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:107, 113; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 142, 148.

61. I am grateful to the first anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I emphasize the importance of intercession. Byzantine texts describe the Virgin’s intercession in bestowing divinely sanctioned authority on both emperors and imperial women. For example, the vita of Empress Theophano (wife of Leo VI) relates that an icon of the Mother of God revealed through anointment that Theophano would become empress and reports a miracle that turned Theophano’s white garment into purple, see Eduard Kurtz, ed., “Zwei griechische Texte über die hl. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI,” *Mémoires de l’Académie impériale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg*, ser. 8, t. 3, no. 2 (1898): i–xi, 1–132, esp. 4, lines 3–21. Another example is found in the panegyric of Corippus addressed to Justin II, see n. 64 below.

62. Arwed Arnulf, “Eine Perle für das Haupt Leons VI: Epigraphische und ikonographische Untersuchungen zum sogenannten Scepter Leons VI,” *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 23 (1990): 69–84, esp. 76–77.

63. *De Cer.*, 1:55, lines 10–14; Vogt, *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:50, lines 18–22. Also see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 29; for a discussion of images of the Virgin associated with imperial victory in war, see *ibid.*, 61–103.

64. *De Cer.*, 1:57, lines 7–13; Vogt, *Livre des cérémonies*, 1: 52, lines 17–23. I thank David Lupher for pointing out that this text evokes Psalm 140:7 (New International Version): “Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer, you shield my head in the day of battle.” I am also grateful for his assistance in the translation of this and the previous Greek passage. All biblical passages are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, unless indicated otherwise. Arnulf notes that another passage in the *Book of Ceremonies* describes the imperial coronation mediated by the intercession of the Virgin; see Arnulf, “Eine Perle für das Haupt Leons VI,” 77; for the passage, see *De Cer.*, 1:283, lines 7–11 and Vogt, *Le livre des cérémonies* 2:92, lines 26–30; Der Nersessian provides the following translation of it: “May our almighty and most compassionate God, who has crowned you through the intercession of His immaculate mother, grant us the favor of celebrating in peace . . . these happy days, for many years to come.” See Der Nersessian, “Two Images of the Virgin in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection,” 73. It is, however, noteworthy that the motif of the Virgin crowning the emperor appears in other sources as well. For example, Corippus’s panegyric (sixth c.) addressed to Justin II describes a dream in which Justin is visited by the Virgin who crowns him and announces his elevation to the throne upon the death of his

uncle, Justinian: “the Virgin, gliding down through the upper side of heaven, . . . stood before his [i.e., the emperor’s] divine feet and put the crown on him with her right hand, circling his head with the holy diadem, and clothed him gently with the imperial robe.” See Flavius Cresconius Corippus, *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*, ed. and trans. Averil Cameron (London: Athlone Press, 1976), 88; for commentary, see *ibid.*, 129–30. In this text the Virgin is pivotal in articulating the transfer of imperial power and the accession of the new emperor.

65. Pentcheva advanced a similar argument for Constantine IX Monomachos in promoting the Virgin as a fighter to counteract his lack of military credentials; see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 92–93.

66. The *labarum* was revived as a significant imperial attribute in numismatic iconography of the ninth century, although until the early eleventh century it was mostly used on copper coins. It becomes a standard imperial attribute on gold coins of Constantine VIII (r. 1025–28). Although Grierson states that the *labarum* lost its military connotation because on occasion children and empresses are shown holding it, this conclusion is questionable. No empresses are shown holding the *labarum* before Zoe and Theodora, suggesting that it likely retained military connotations, see *DOC* 3.1, 134–38.

67. For a similar reading of this coin, see Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Thoughts on Mary East and West,” in *Images of the Mother of God, Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 277–92, esp. 281. For a discussion of the significance of the orant Virgin, see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 76–77, 145–46.

68. See *DOC* 3.2, 748–51, Plate LXII, 1a1–1d.

69. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 27–35, 61–103, 190.

70. The motif of the Virgin crowning an imperial figure was introduced into the iconography of gold coins by John Tzimiskes (r. 969–76); see *DOC* 3.1, 170, 174, *DOC* 3.2, 589–98, Plate XLII/1a–6c. For coins of Romanos III with the emperor crowned by the Virgin, see *ibid.*, 711–19, Plate LVI 1a.2–1d.11.

71. The size of the roundel is 5 x 4.4 cm; see Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels*, no. 70, p. 60; Dchobadze-Zizichwili “Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli,” no. 92, 48–49; his extended right wing has been cut off and the enamel is missing from his right foot.

72. Mikaberidze, however, proposed that if the angel is identified as Gabriel, it would make reference to childbirth, and if he is understood as Michael, it would allude to the husband of Maria of Albania, Michael VII;



see Mikaberidze, "Die byzantinische Kaiserin Maria-Martha," 198. Cotsonis and Halsall discuss the popularity of the archangel Michael: John Cotsonis, "The Contribution of Byzantine Lead Seals to the Study of the Cult of the Saints (Sixth-Twelfth Century)," *Byzantion* 75(2005): 383-497, esp. 396, 437-47; Paul Halsall, "Women's Bodies, Men's Souls: Sanctity and Gender in Byzantium," (PhD diss., Fordham University, New York, 1999), Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and p. 35.

73. Dchobadze-Zizichwili, "Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli," 48-49, suggested that the female figure dressed in imperial garments is the Virgin. This seems unlikely because the Maria Regina image is not prevalent in Byzantine visual images; further, it would make little sense to represent the Virgin in imperial dress in one image and in her traditional garment in another within the same series.

74. For the manuscript page, see Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, 375-80 and fig. 6. For the enkolpion, see Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 113, pp. 165-16. For a discussion of the iconography the Annunciation, see Cotsonis, "Narrative Scenes on Byzantine Lead Seals," 61-63, with further bibliography.

75. For the devotion of Macedonian emperors, particularly Basil I and Leo VI, to the archangels, see Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 192-99; Paul Magdalino, "Observations on the Nea Ekklesia of Basil I," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 37 (1987): 51-64, esp. 56-60. Images showing Macedonian emperors in the company of angels include: f. Cv in Paris Gr. 510; the Leo Scepter in Berlin; the mosaic panel above the imperial door in Hagia Sophia; f. IIIr of the Psalter of Basil II; f. 3r of Sinai gr. 364.

76. Maguire explored how the emperor's connection with liturgical feasts may be articulated in visual imagery; see Henry Maguire, "The Mosaics of Nea Moni: An Imperial Reading," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992): 205-24; Henry Maguire, "Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art," *Gesta* 28, no. 2 (1989): 217-31. Also see Wolfram Hörander, *Theodoros Prodromos, historische Gedichte*, Wiener byzantinische Studien 11 (Vienna: Verlag der österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1974), 80-85, 89-109.

However, the similarity between the reception ceremony following the birth of the imperial heir and the Adoration of the Magi recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies* has been noted; see Otto Treitinger, *Die Oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung in höfischen Zeremoniell*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: H. Gentner, 1956), 109n314; Philip Grierson, "The Date of the Dumbarton Oaks Epiphany Medallion," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961): 221-24,

esp. 224. For English translation of excerpts from the text of the reception ceremony, see Henry Maguire, "Images of the Court," in Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, 190-91.

77. For rhetorical formulas for the emperor, see, for example, George T. Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997), 131-40, esp. 135. For rhetorical formulas for the empress, see Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 75; Maguire, "Images of the Court," 191. For Zoe as the brilliant moon, see John Mauropous's Poem 54, in *Iohannis Euchaitorum metropolitae*, ed. J. Bollig and P. de Lagarde, 31. For the praise of the beauty of empresses, see Kotsis, "Representations of Middle Byzantine Empresses," 308-23; Lynda Garland, "'The Eye of the Beholder': Byzantine Imperial Women and Their Public Image from Zoe Porphyrogenita to Euphrosyne Kamaterissa Doukaina (1028-1203)," *Byzantion* 64 (1994): 19-39, 261-313. For examples of comparisons with ancient goddesses and statues, see Anna Komnene's comparison of Maria of Alania to Aphrodite and the works of Apelles and Phidias, Comnena, *Alexiad*, 107; Anna describes her mother as an incarnation of Athena, *ibid*, 110-11. For Eudokia Ingerina's association with Venus, see Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-century Byzantium*, 162n74.

78. For Theodora, see *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998), 379; for Theophano's vita, see Kurtz, "Zwei griechische Texte über die heilige Theophano," 8, lines 20-21, 10, line 2. Theophano's vita is dated to shortly after her death and during the reign of her husband, Leo VI (r. 886-912); see Paul Magdalino, "Saint Demetrios and Leo VI," *Byzantinoslavica* 51, no. 2 (1990): 198-201; Alexander Alexakis, "Leo VI, Theophano, A 'Magistros' Called Slokakas, and the 'Vita Theophano' (BHG 1794)," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995): 45-56. Theodora was also linked to the Magi in her vita (dated 867-912) during her visit to a holy man who foretold her elevation to the position of Empress; see "Life of Saint Theodora the Empress," trans. Martha P. Vinson, in *Byzantine Defenders of Images*, 365. The Magi were also associated with imperial donations, as the imagery on the hem of another Theodora on the sixth-century panel at San Vitale attests; see René Justice Standley, "The Role of the Empress Theodora in the Imperial Panels at the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna," in *Representations of the Feminine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, *Feminea Medievalia* 1 (Dallas, TX: Academia, 1993), 161-74.

79. Nike Koutrakou, "Use and Abuse of the 'Image' of the Theotokos in

the Political Life of Byzantium (with Special Reference to the Iconoclast Period),” in *Images of the Mother of God* 77-89, esp. 78-80.

80. For a parallel example of the application of the traditionally male genre of the *basilikos logos* to praise an empress, see Martha P. Vinson, “Life of St. Theodora the Empress,” 353-54; also see Martha P. Vinson, “The Life of Theodora and the Rhetoric of the Byzantine Bride Show,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 49 (1999): 31-60.

81. “On the Annunciation I,” Marjorie Carpenter, trans., *Kontakia of Romanos: Byzantine Melodist*, vol. 2, *On Christian Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 9, strophe 1.

82. For the literary topos of the Virgin as queen in Byzantine texts, see Kotsis, “Representations of Middle Byzantine Empresses,” 345-56, with further bibliography. The homily of Patriarch Germanos on the Annunciation develops the motif of the Virgin as queen extensively; see Germanos of Constantinople, “Oration on the Annunciation of the Supremely Holy Theotokos,” in *Wider Than Heaven: Eighth-century Homilies on the Mother of God*, trans. Mary B. Cunningham (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 221-46.

83. That Zoe was designated to be the carrier of the imperial lineage is made clear by her marriage to Romanos III at her father’s deathbed in 1028. Although the couple attempted to conceive a child, Zoe was ca. fifty years old and past childbearing age at the time of this marriage; see n.88 below. There is also evidence that one of the daughters of Constantine VIII was sent to the West to marry the emperor Otto III in 1002, although this nuptial did not take place because the groom died before the bride even landed. This shows that at least one of the sisters, quite likely Zoe, was expected to fulfill her traditional female role of becoming a wife with the corollary of bearing children according to plans conceived during the lifetime of her uncle Basil II. See Ernst Gamillscheg, “Zoe und Theodora als Träger dynastischer Vorstellungen in den Geschichtsquellen ihrer Epoche,” in *Kaiserin Theophanu: Begegnung des Ostens und des Westens um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends*, ed. Anton von Euw and Peter Schreiner, 2 vols. (Cologne: Das [Schnütgen] Museum, 1991), 2:397-403, esp.397; Gunther Wolf, “Zoe oder Theodora—Die Braut Kaiser Ottos III? (1001/1002),” in *Kaiserin Theophanu: Prinzessin aus der Fremde – des Westreichs Große Kaiserin*, ed. Gunther Wolf (Weimar: Böhlau, 1991), 212-22; Tinnfeld, however, questions the historicity of this report; see Franz Tinnfeld, “Byzantinische auswärtige Heiratspolitik vom 9. zum 12. Jahrhundert. Kontinuität und Wandel der Prinzipien und der praktischen

Ziele,” *Byzantinoslavica* 54 (1993): 21-28, esp. 24.

84. The story of the Virgin spinning the purple thread is derived from the *Protoevangelium of James*; for English translation, see *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 8, *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY, 1886), 361-67, esp. 363. For a discussion of the significance of the spinning of the purple thread in Middle Byzantine images of the Annunciation and its connection with the incarnation, see Maria Evangelatou, “The Purple Thread of the Flesh: The Theological Connotations of a Narrative Iconographic Element in Byzantine Images of the Annunciation,” in *Icon & Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 261-79; also see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 152-54. For the purple wool as a reference to the royal lineage of the Virgin, see Paul Atkins Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 3 vols. (New York: Routledge, 1967), 1:76-78.

85. For a discussion of the Annunciation’s link with fertility, renewal of life, and springtime, see Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 44-52. For the amuletic function of objects with Annunciation scenes in the Early Byzantine period, see Aimilia Yeroulanou, “The Mother of God in Jewellery,” in *Mother of God*, ed. Maria Vassilaki, 227-35, esp. 228-29, 231; Henry Maguire, “The Cult of the Mother of God in Private,” *ibid.*, 279-89, esp. 280-81, 284; and Ann van Dijk, “The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Imagery,” *Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (1999): 420-36, esp. 429.

86. Brigitte Pitarakis, “Female Piety in Context: Understanding Developments in Private Devotional Practices,” *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 153-66, esp. 158.

87. Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 113, 165-66, with illustrations of both sides. However, Maguire noted that narrative images become less frequent on small-scale devotional objects in the period following Iconoclasm; see Henry Maguire, “The Cult of the Mother of God in Private.”

88. See Vasso Penna, “Zoe’s Lead Seal: Female Invocation to the Annunciation of the Virgin,” in *Images of the Mother of God*, 175-79, with an illustration of the seal, fig. 15.1. Cotsonis, however, does not link this seal with Empress Zoe and suggests a twelfth-century date for it; see Cotsonis, “Narrative Scenes on Byzantine Lead Seals,” 81n37. For Zoe’s attempts to conceive a child during her first marriage, see Psellos, *Chronographie*, 34-35;

Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 65.

89. Cotsonis, "Narrative Scenes on Byzantine Lead Seals," Graph 4, p. 58 and p. 61. The popularity of seals with the Annunciation increases in the tenth century and they become particularly frequent in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries among narrative seals; however, it is important to keep in mind that seals with narrative images are quite rare among iconographic seals with religious imagery, *ibid.*, 58-59, 67. For the seals owned by women that show the Annunciation, see *ibid.*, 67; nos. 41, 53, 68, 69, 70, 83 in Appendix 3. In addition, very few Byzantine women's seals from the sixth to the twelfth centuries survive: 99 out of the 7555 seals Cotsonis cataloged belonged to women, see *ibid.*, 67. Twenty-one of the fifty-four seals decorated with the Annunciation are inscribed with invocations seeking the help of the Mother of God while only one addresses Christ, see *ibid.* 71.

90. See *PG* 107, cols. 21-28, esp. 21B-C, 26-28; Theodora Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 166; André Grabar, *L'iconoclisme byzantine: Le dossier archéologique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 1984), 251; Zaga A. Gavrilović, "The Humiliation of Leo VI the Wise (The Mosaic of the Narthex at Saint Sophia, Istanbul)," *Cahiers archéologiques* 28 (1979): 87-94, esp. 88; and Maria Delivorria, "Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'impératrice byzantine" (PhD diss., Paris, Sorbonne, 1966), 128.

91. Kathleen Corrigan, "The Ivory Scepter of Leo VI," Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 138, 201-2; Arnulf connects the ivory to Leo's homily on the Annunciation because of the shared motif of the pearl, Arnulf, "Eine Perle für das Haupt Leons VI," 83; *PG* 107, cols. 24D-25A.

92. *De Cer.*, 1:162-70; Vogt, *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:151-57; Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance*, 195-97. The empresses Pulcheria (d. 453) and Verina (d. 484) were both credited with the foundation of the church, while Zeno (r. 476-91), Justin II and Sophia (r. 565-78), and Basil I (r. 867-86) had sponsored restorations and embellishments to the building; see *ODB* 1:408. Giulia Zulian emphasizes the Chalkoprateia's imperial association in "Reconstructing the Image of an Empress in Middle Byzantine Constantinople: Gender in Byzantium, Psellos' Empress Zoe and the Chapel of Christ Antiphonites," *Rosetta* 2 (2007): 32-55, esp. 40-42, with references to earlier bibliography (however, note the erroneous date given for the reign of Justin II and Sophia). For localizing the church of Antiphonites at the Chalkoprateia, see Titos Papamastorakis, "The Empress Zoe's Tomb," in *Hē autokratōria se krisē: To Vyzantio ton 11o aiōna (1025-1081) = The Empire in Crisis? Byzantium in the 11th Century (1025-1081)*, ed. Vasiliki N. Vlyssidou

(Athens: Kentro gia ten Melete tou Hellenismou “Spyros Vasileios Bryones,” 2003), 497-511.

93. For the epigram describing Zoe’s patronage of a lavish floor for the building during her marriage to Romanos III, see *ibid.*, 503-4; also see Zulian, “Reconstructing the Image of an Empress,” 33. For Christ Antiphonetes, “the one who responds” or the “guarantor,” see *ODB* 1: 439. For Zoe’s devotion to Christ Antiphonetes, see Psellus, *Chronographie*, 1:149-50; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 188-89. For the view that Zoe built rather than restored the Church of Christ Antiphonetes, see Paul Magdalino, “Constantinopolitana,” in *Aetos: Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango Presented to Him on April 14, 1998*, ed. Ihor Ševčenko and Irmgard Hutter (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998), 220-32, esp. 225-26 (reprinted in Paul Magdalino, *Studies on the History and Topography of Constantinople*, Variorum Collected Studies Series; CS855 [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007]).

94. *DOC* 3.2, 721-22, 726; Michael Hendy, “Michael IV and Harold Hardrada,” *Numismatic Chronicle*, ser. 7, 10 (1970): 187-97, Plate 14 (reprinted in Michael Hendy, *The Economy, Fiscal Administration and Coinage of Byzantium* [Northampton: Variorum Reprints, 1989]).

95. The medallion is 5 × 4.4 cm in size; see Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels*, no. 69, p. 59. The inscription was misread by Dchobadze-Zizichwili, “Los esmaltes del Icono de Jajuli,” 49 and Mikeladze, “Świeckie postacie historyczne na emaliowanych medalionach z Tryptyku Chachulskiego,” 397. The empress’s right foot has been cut off the medallion while the tip of John’s staff and a section of the ground he stands on have also been damaged. Enamel chunks of the left hand of the empress and of the right hand and arm of John have also been lost.

96. Halsall noted that the Baptist had the most hagiographic documents, hymns, and churches dedicated to him after the Virgin, see Halsall, “Women’s Bodies, Men’s Souls,” Table 2.1, Table 2.2, 35, Table 2.3, 42-48. Cotsonis also confirms the immense popularity of the Baptist: he is the sixth most frequently represented saint on seals; see Cotsonis, “The Contribution of Byzantine Lead Seals to the Study of the Cult of the Saints,” Chart 3 on 393-97, and 415-18.

97. For the Feast of the Epiphany, see *ODB* 1:715. The Epiphany is also called Theophany or the Feast of Light in Greek sources; see Nicholas E. Denysenko, “The Blessing of Waters on the Feast of Theophany in the Byzantine Rite: Historical Formation and Theological Implications” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 2008), 12-13. For



discussion on the diverging developments of the Feast of the Epiphany in the Christian West (which celebrates the adoration of the Magi on January 6) and the Christian East (which celebrates the Baptism of Christ), see Theodor E. Mommsen, "Aponius and Orosius on the Significance of the Epiphany," in *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 96-111, esp. 96-97, 101.

98. The major liturgical celebrations include September 23 (conception); January 6-7 (the Epiphany and the arrival of the arm relic of the Baptist in Constantinople); February 24 and May 25 (discovery of the head relic); June 24 (birth); August 29 (beheading). The smaller commemorations include January 24 (commemoration on the Forum Tauri); July 23 (commemoration at the Olympiou quarter); October 29 (commemoration in the Church of Saint Paul). For churches of the Baptist, see *ODB* 2:1068; Raymond Janin, "Les Églises byzantines du Précurseur à Constantinople," in *Échos d'Orient* 37 (1938): 312-51, esp. 312; Raymond Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantine, III: Les églises et les monastères* (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1953), 423-57.

99. For the account of John's miraculous conception announced to his father Zachariah by the archangel Gabriel, see Luke 1:5-23, 36. Also see Pitarakis, "Female Piety in Context," 158.

100. For the iconography of John the Baptist, see Klaus Wessel, "Johannes Baptistes (Prodromos)," *Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*, vol. 3, cols. 616-47; E. Weis, "Johannes der Täufer (Baptista), der Vorläufer (Prodromos)," *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum and Günter Bandmann (Rome: Herder, 1968-76), Bd. 7, cols. 164-90. The preaching scene is shown, for example, in monumental decorations in Cappadocia at Old Tokali Kilise (early tenth c.) and at Belli Kilise, Soğanlı (late tenth c.); see Marcell Restle, *Byzantine Wall Painting in Asia Minor* (Recklinghausen: Bongers, 1967), vol. 2, figs. 62-63 and vol. 3, no. 47. John conversing with Christ is represented at Hosios Loukas (first half of the eleventh c.); see Théano Chatzidakis, "Particularités iconographiques du décor peint des chapelles occidentales de Saint-Luc en Phocide," *Cahiers archéologiques* 22 (1972): 89-113, figs. 19-22, for further examples.

101. Matthew 3:7-10, emphasis mine. Compare this to Christ's speech to his disciples where he reminds them about the coming of false prophets and how to recognize them in Matthew 7:15-20, with an elaboration on the tree metaphor introduced in John's speech. Also see Luke 3:9.

102. For an analysis of the biblical passage, see John Nolland, *The Gospel*

of *Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 132-49; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 116-31.

103. See Pitarakis, "Female Piety in Context," 160-62. See also the extensive list of biblical passages used in the panegyrics of Michael Psellos, in George T. Dennis, ed., *Michaelis Pselli Orationes Panegyricae* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1994), 196-98; for biblical allusions in Byzantine letters, see A. R. Littlewood, "The Byzantine Letter of Consolation in the Macedonian and Komnenian Periods," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 19-41.

104. These scenes usually show the two protagonists; however, note the exception on f. 146r in Paris gr. 533 (late eleventh c.), where the scene of John's baptizing is combined with his encounter with Christ; see George Galavaris, *The Illustrations of the Liturgical Homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), fig. 246, and 236-39.

105. Théano Chatzidakis, "Particularités iconographiques," 106-12; Théano Chatzidakis-Bacharas, *Les peintures murales de Hosios Loukas: Les chapelles occidentales* (Athens: Christianike Archaiologike Hetaireia, 1982), 33-34. For its dating to 1011-40 or 1022-50, see, *ibid.*, 183-88, and Nano Chatzidakis, *Hosios Loukas* (Athens: Melissa Publishing House, 1997), 93. Théano Chatzidakis noted the relative rarity of the iconography of the encounter of John and Christ in "Particularités iconographiques," 108.

106. See Théano Chatzidakis, "Particularités iconographiques," 112-13; Théano Chatzidakis-Bacharas, *Les peintures murales de Hosios Loukas*, 33, 83-86, 113-18; Nano Chatzidakis, *Hosios Loukas*, 65-66; also see Sharon J. Gerstel, "The Layperson in Church," in Derek Krueger, ed., *Byzantine Christianity, A People's History of Christianity*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 103-23, esp. 117-21; Gabriel Millet, "Recherches au Mount-Athos III (Phiale et simandre à Lavra)," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, 29 (1905): 105-23, esp. 116; Federica A. Broilo, "'Cleanses the Sins with the Water of the Pure-flowing Font': Fountains for Ablutions in the Byzantine Constantinopolitan Context," *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 47, 1-4 (2009): 5-24. The Blessing of Waters produced holy water with bodily and spiritual healing powers, renewing the benefits of Baptism. For an eleventh-century text of the ritual of the Minor Blessing of Water, see Jeffrey C. Anderson and John W. Nesbitt, "The Liturgy of the Minor Blessing of the Water According to Cod. Paris. Coisl. 213," in *Metaphrastes, or, Gained in Translation: Essays and Translations in Honour of Robert H. Jordan*, ed. Margaret Mullett, Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations 9 (Belfast:

Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 2004), 240-47.

107. Evidence for imperial patronage comes several centuries after the completion of the monument: a report from 1436 suggests that the patron was Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042-55), while eighteenth-century tradition links the foundation to Romanos II (r. 959-63) and his wife, Theophano; see *ODB* 2:949-50; Karoline Kreidl-Papadopoulos, "Housios Lukas," *Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*, vol. 3, cols. 264-318, esp. cols. 268-69. For the recent suggestions that Eudokia, the daughter of Constantine VIII and older sister of Zoe and Theodora, was the patron of the building, see Andreas Schminck, "Hosios Lukas: Eine Kaiserliche Stiftung?" in *Hē autokratoria se krisē: To Vyzantio ton 11o aiōna (1025-1081)=The Empire in Crisis*, 349-80. For patronage of the local aristocracy, see Nano Chatzidakis, *Hosios Loukas*, 10-12. However, the involvement of the local aristocracy does not necessarily negate the possibility of imperial patronage. For stylistic analysis, see Chatzidakis, *Hosios Loukas*, 93; she links the style of the decoration at Hosios Loukas with the style of the Monomachos panel on the south gallery of Hagia Sophia (1042-55), a work clearly associated with imperial or patriarchal patronage.

108. See for example, Maguire, "Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art"; Hörander, *Theodoros Prodromos*, 91-92.

109. It has been shown that the scene of the encounter of John and Christ was closely associated with the liturgical celebration of the Epiphany and the Blessing of Waters; see Théano Chatzidakis, "Particularités iconographiques;" Galavaris, *Illustrations of the Liturgical Homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus*, 87-94.

110. See, for instance, "Lamb, Sheep," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, vol. 2 (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1975-78), 410-14. Also see "Lamb," and "Lamb of God," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, rev. ed., vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1986), 61-63.

111. See F. E. Brightman, ed., *Liturgies, Eastern and Western* (Oxford, 1896), 356-61. Also see George Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 65-69; for *amnos* see *ODB* 1:79; for *prothesis* (offertory) see *ODB* 3:1743; for *prosphora* (offering) see *ibid.*, 1740. Also see Robert F. Taft, SJ, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, vol. 5, *The Precommunion Rites* (Rome: Pontificium Inst. Studiorum Orientalium, 2000), 319-79.

112. For instance, the *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton* uses the

expression “lamb of Jesus” to refer to Irene, the abbess of the convent at Chrysobalanton, while the term “lamb of Christ” is applied to one of the nuns in her convent; see Jan Olof Rosenqvist, trans., *The Life of St Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation, Notes and Indices*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 1 (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1986), 24, lines 17–18, 54, line 10. Further examples for the use of *amnos* to signify members of a monastic community may be found in John Philip Thomas, Angela Constantinides Hero, and Giles Constable, eds., *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders’ Typika and Testaments* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000).

113. See Cotsonis “The Contribution of Byzantine Lead Seals to the Study of the Cult of the Saints,” 418. Also see, Edmondo F. Lupieri, “Felices sunt qui imitantur Iohannem (Hier. Hom. in Io.),” *Augustinianum* 24 (1984): 33–71; E. Lupieri, “John the Baptist: The First Monk; A Contribution to the History of the Figure of John the Baptist in the Early Monastic World,” *Word and Spirit* 6 (1984): 11–23.

114. He suggested that the favorable attitude of Maria of Alania (wife of Michael VII, r. 1071–78) toward monks is expressed on the medallion; see Mikaberidze, “Die byzantinische Kaiserin Maria-Martha,” 201.

115. Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:106, 108; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 141–42, 144. Interestingly, Skylitzes reports that Michael had Zoe change into imperial dress before displaying her to the crowd; see Ioannis Scylitzae, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. Hans Thurn, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 419, lines 41–43; *John Skylitzes, A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, introd., text and notes translated by John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 394. Yet another historian, Zonaras, states that Michael had Zoe appear in a nun’s habit; see *ibid.*, n. 17.

116. See Jean Ebersolt, *Sanctuaires de Byzance: Recherches sur les anciens trésors des églises de Constantinople* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1921), 134–37; Kalavrezou, “Helping Hands for the Empire,” in *Byzantine Court Culture*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997).

117. For the Hebdomon, see *ODB* 2:907. For the church of John the Baptist at the Hebdomon, see Thomas F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park: Pennsylvania

State University Press, 1971), 55-61; Janin, "Les églises byzantines du Précurseur a Constantinople," 313-19; Janin, *Les églises et les monastères*, 426-29; Ebersolt, *Sanctuaires de Byzance*, 79-83. For the Hebdomon as a place manifesting imperial victory, see Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 107; Claudia Rapp, "Comparison, Paradigm and the Case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography," in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. Mary Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 277-98, esp. 282-83. For a list of emperors whose inauguration ceremonials were linked with the Hebdomon, see Alexander van Millingen, "The Hebdomon," in Alexander van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople, The Walls of the City and Adjoining Historical Sites* (London, 1899), 330-31, with reference to primary sources. For the Hebdomon as a place of imperial proclamation, see Cyril Mango, "The Triumphal Way of Constantinople and the Golden Gate," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 54 (2000): 173-88, esp. 176n24. For the Hebdomon's close association with imperial coronations, see Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, 56.

118. The Menologion of Basil II records that this relic was rediscovered and translated to Constantinople during the reign of Michael III (r. 842-67) for the purpose of protecting and strengthening the city, see *PG* 117, cols. 325-326/C. For the visit of the relic to Basil's deathbed, see Ioannis Zonaras, *Epitomae historiarum*, ed. Moritz Pinder, CSHB 49 (Bonn, 1897), bk. 17, chap. 9, 568-69, and *Georgius Cedrenus*, ed. B. G. Niebuhr (Bonn, 1839), 2: 479-80. John the Baptist was closely associated with death and funerary practices: members of the imperial family often designated him as the patron saint of their final resting place, see Janin, "Les églises byzantines du Précurseur a Constantinople," 338-39; Janin, *Les églises et les monastères*, 429, 444. However, dedicating funerary chapels to the Baptist is not necessarily an imperial phenomenon, see Pitarakis, "Female Piety in Context," 159n40.

119. For the celebration on August 29, see *De Cer.*, 2:562-63. For Michael V seeking refuge at the Studios Monastery, see Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:109; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 144-45; Ioannis Scylitzae, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. Thurn, 420, lines 89-96; *John Skylitzes, A Synopsis*, trans. Wortley, 395.

120. Kalavrezou, "Helping Hands for the Empire," 67-79.

121. Ibid., pp. 67-68; Ioannis Scylitzae, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. Thurn, 245, lines 27-32; *John Skylitzes*, trans. Wortley, 236. Also see John Wortley,

“Relics of ‘The Friends of Jesus’ at Constantinople,” in *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. Jannic Durand and Bernard Flusin (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2004) (reprinted in John Wortley, *Studies in the Cult of Relics*), 143–57, esp. 150–51.

122. Kalavrezou, “Helping Hands for the Empire,” 78. For Theodore Daphnopates, see *ODB* 1:588.

123. Constantine VII was the only and much awaited son of Leo VI born to his mistress Zoe Karbonopsina in 905. Leo married her after the birth of their son. This caused one of the great religio-political quarrels of the early tenth century, the so-called tetragamy controversy since this was Leo’s fourth marriage, prohibited by law. For Leo’s wives, see Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 109–35; Shaun Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People*, *Medieval Mediterranean* 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 133–63; for the tetragamy controversy, see *ODB* 3: 2027, with further bibliography.

124. Others exercised control over the imperial office from 912 to 945. First his uncle Alexander (r. 912–13) reigned, and then various other individuals also exerted influence: the regent Nicholas Mystikos (913–14), Constantine’s mother, Zoe (r. 914–20), and finally the usurping emperor Romanos I (r. 920–45); see Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 471–86; *DOC* 3.2, 526–29.

125. Orosius explains that the peace established by Augustus and Christ’s Baptism took place on the same day, January 6, see Mommsen, “Aponius and Orosius on the Significance of the Epiphany,” 106–7.

126. Wenger argued that the emperor was Arcadius whose son, Theodosius II, received baptism in 402; see A. Wenger, “Notes inédites sur les empereurs II,” *Revue des études byzantines* 10 (1952): 51–54. Also see Grierson’s analysis of a sixth-century medallion that expresses similar ideology in “The Date of the Dumbarton Oaks Epiphany Medallion,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1961): 221–24.

127. The identification of the blessing figure as John the Baptist was first suggested by Nicole Thierry, “A propos de la mosaïque murale de Durreč (Albanie),” *Archéologia* 83 (1975): 60–62, and was reiterated in “Le Baptiste sur le solidus d’Alexandre (912–913),” *Revue numismatique* 34 (1992): 237–41. For the less convincing identification of the same figure as St. Alexander, see *DOC* 3.2, 523–25.

128. The Baptism is positioned intentionally outside the chronological sequence of the Christological narrative; see Nicole Thierry, “Le souverain



dans les programmes d'églises en Cappadoce et en Géorgie du Xe au XIIIe siècles," *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes* 4 (1988): 127-70, esp. 130; Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce: Le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords* (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1991), 15n6.

129. *De Cer.*, 1:139-43; *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:130-32; Denysenko, *The Blessing of Waters*, 29-31, 38, 51, 159-61. For the similarity of baptism and *Hagiasmos* (Blessing of the Water), see Rhodoniki Etzeoglou, "The Cult of the Virgin Zoodochos Pege at Mistra," in *Images of the Mother of God*, 239-49, esp. 243-24; and Millet, "Phiale et simandre à Lavra."

130. *De Cer.*, 1:144-45; *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:134-35. *Propylaeum ad Acta sanctorum Novembris: Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. H. Delehaye (Brussels: apud socios Bollandianos, 1902), cols. 373-74; Paul A. Bushkovitch, "The Epiphany Ceremony of the Russian Court in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Russian Review* 49, no. 1 (1990): 1-17, esp. 4-5.

131. See, for example, *De Cer.*, 1:42-43; *Le livre des cérémonies* 1:36.

132. See Kalavrezou, "Helping Hands for the Empire," 73; for the Greek text, see *De Cer.*, 1:43; *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:36. By the twelfth century, relics of the Baptist (including the right arm) had become linked with imperial consecration rituals, see Kalavrezou, "Helping Hands for the Empire," 74.

133. *De Cer.*, 1: 43, lines 5-7; *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:36.

134. See Maguire, "Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art," 228; Maguire, "The Mosaics of Nea Moni," 210; Theodore Prodromos, "Hymnus domino Joanni Comneno in baptismali festo Christi," *PG*, 133, cols. 1390-92; Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte*, 84-85, 248-51, poem 10.

135. See Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric," 136; Dimiter Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium: 1204-1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 31.

136. For a recent analysis of the Mother of God as intercessor in Byzantium, see Jane Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 267-318. For the Deesis, see Christopher Walter, "Two Notes on the Deësis," *Revue des études byzantines* 26 (1968): 311-36, and "Further Notes on the Deësis," *Revue des études byzantines* 28 (1970): 161-87; Anthony Cutler, "Under the Sign of the Deësis: On the Question of Representativeness in Medieval Art and Literature," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 145-54, draws attention to the mutable nature of the iconography of the Deesis, emphasizing variation both in the numbers and identity of the

figures comprising such scenes.

137. Herrin emphasized the importance of imperial women in contributing to the development of the cult of the Virgin in Byzantium; see Herrin, "Imperial Feminine," 12-18, 25-28.

138. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 27-31; for the arm relic placed in the Pharos, see Kalavrezou, "Helping Hands for the Empire," 67-68.

139. See Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 28. The ninth-century patriarch Photios describes the mosaic of the Virgin at the Pharos as follows: "The apse which rises over the sanctuary glistens with the image of the Virgin, stretching out her stainless arms on our behalf and winning for the emperor safety and exploits against the foes." The passage gives evidence for the iconographic type of the Mother of God and emphasizes the Virgin's intercession in securing protection and victory for the emperor; for English trans., see Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 186.

140. Kalavrezou, "Helping Hands for the Empire," 61n36.

141. For Zoe Karbonopsina's conception miracle, see Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 114. Theophano's vita relates that her parents appealed to the Mother of God at one of her sanctuaries and that they were eventually granted a daughter. It also narrates that a girdle taken from the same church aided her mother in the painful delivery; see Kurtz, "Zwei griechische Texte über die heilige Theophano," p. 2, lines 13-35, p. 3, lines 1-5. For female healing, see Molly Fulghum Heintz, "Health: Magic, Medicine, and Prayer," in *Byzantine Women and Their World*, ed. Ioli Kalavrezou and Angeliki E. Laiou (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 275-81. Herrin also emphasizes the important belief of women in the Virgin's power to heal infertility and aid in childbirth; see Herrin, "The Imperial Feminine," 19.

142. Pitarakis, "Female Piety in Context," 158-60. For a discussion of images that juxtapose the Virgin and the Baptist in Middle Byzantine images to allude to the liturgical rite of *proskomide* (the preparation of the Eucharistic offering), see Der Nersessian, "Two Images of the Virgin," 76-77.

143. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, *Festal Orations*, trans. Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 91-92.

144. Romanos's work was read by several later authors who left behind works that reflect the influence of his poetry; see *ODB* 3:1808 and Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos*, 1:xxvi. The popularity of Romanos's hymns got a boost from the mid-tenth century through newly produced collections of his work, called *kontakarion*, see *ibid.*, xxxi-xxxii. Also see Elpidio Mioni,

“Osservazioni sulla tradizione manoscritta di Romano il Melode,” in *Atti del V Congresso Internazionale di studi bizantini: Roma, 20-26 settembre, 1936*, 2 vols., Studi bizantini e neoellenici 5-6 (Rome: Tip. del Senato del dott. G. Bardi, 1939-40), 507-13; Mary B. Cunningham, “The Reception of Romanos in Middle Byzantine Homiletics and Hymnography,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62 (2008): 251-60, esp. 260.

145. *Kontakia of Romanos*, 1:51-52, strophe 5. Also see, for example, the homily of Theodore Studite (eighth-ninth c.) on the beheading of John the Baptist, where John recalls his recognition of the Messiah in his mother’s womb; see Der Nersessian, “Two Images of the Virgin,” 75.

146. *Kontakia of Romanos*, 1:53, strophe 8. In strophe 4 of the same hymn there is a further reference to Zachariah trembling before Gabriel, just like the Baptist shuddered before Christ during their encounter at the Jordan enriching the parallelism; see *ibid.*, 51.

147. *Ibid.*, 54, strophe 12. John is described as the son of a “sterile woman” to highlight his miraculous birth in another hymn; see *Kontakia of Romanos*, 2:26, strophe 2 (On the Beheading of John the Baptist).

148. Andrew of Crete (eighth c.), for example, in a homily on the Annunciation, makes extensive references to the miraculous conception of John the Baptist, his recognition of the Messiah in the womb, and the parallel between the annunciations to Zachariah and to Mary; see Andrew of Crete, “Oration on the Annunciation of the Supreme Holy Lady, Our Theotokos,” in *Wider Than Heaven*, 197-219, esp. 199, 211, 216, 217. For the Greek text see *PG* 97, cols. 881-913. Germanos of Constantinople also connects the conceptions of John and Christ; see “Oration on the Annunciation of the Supremely Holy Theotokos,” *ibid.*, 221-46, esp. 229, 230, 237.

149. The cameo with the Annunciation dates to the sixth/seventh centuries, while the intaglio carving of the Deesis is dated between ca. 850 and 1025, see Jannic Durand et al., *Byzance: L’art byzantine dans les collections publiques françaises* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1992), 277-78, fig. 184; also see Walter, “Two Notes on the Deësis,” 315.

150. *ODB* 1:599-600; Walter, “Two Notes on the Deësis,” 332, 334; Walter, “Further Notes on the Deësis,” 182-87.

151. Andrew of Crete, “Oration on the Annunciation of the Supreme Holy Lady, Our Theotokos,” 198; for the text of Gregory of Nyssa, see Everett Ferguson, “Preaching at Epiphany: Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom on Baptism and the Church,” *Church History* 66, no. 1 (1997): 1-17, esp. 3.

152. *De Cer.*, 1:43; *Livre des cérémonies*, 1:37. For the notion of baptism as

“new birth,” also see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1983), 192–95.

153. Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:102; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 138–39.

154. *Despotis* is the less frequently used version of the designation *despoina*; see Elizabeth Bensammar, “La titulature de l’imperatrice et sa signification,” *Byzantion* 46 (1976): 243–91, esp. 284–88. Also see Dion C. Smythe, “Behind the Mask: Empresses and Empire and Middle Byzantium,” in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference held at King’s College London, April 1995*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1997), 141–52, esp. 143. Although it was not used frequently as an official title, it appears often in chronicles, orations, and letters to designate empresses. Hill, *Imperial Women*, 102, 114–17.

155. See Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:87, where Michael V is described as a child and Zoe as mother and mistress (μητρί καὶ δεσπότιδι); Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 122. For adoption, see *ODB* 1:22.

156. Scylitzae, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. Thurn, 418, lines 26–28; *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, trans. Wortley, 393.

157. Scylitzae, *Synopsis historiarum*, ed. Thurn, 434, lines 58–59; for English translation, see Frederick Lauritzen, “A Courtier in the Women’s Quarters: The Rise and Fall of Psellos,” *Byzantion* 77 (2007): 251–66, esp. 259; *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, trans. Wortley, 408.

158. Yet the same rhetoric could also be turned on its head. Psellos records an anecdote about a court jester who told tall tales about being birthed by Zoe and Theodora and who even offered a parody of Theodora’s delivery, stories that the empresses allegedly enjoyed and encouraged; see Psellos, *Chronographie*, 2: 40–41; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 231. While it is possible that this story was invented by Psellos to emphasize the foolishness of the sisters and underscore their inability to fulfill fundamental duties of the Byzantine empress (e.g., childbirth and motherhood), it is also conceivable that such stories were circulated in the court intentionally to show the unprecedented authority bestowed on the sisters, namely that Zoe and Theodora ascended the throne on account of their lineage and despite their inability to produce offspring. However, even this view does not negate the perception of the sisters as mothers of the empire in a general sense.

159. I thank the first anonymous reader for the formulation: “embodiment of the *genius* of the imperial family.”

160. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 47.

161. The balance is also preserved when the three medallions are aligned, with the double coronation placed in the center and the other two roundels flanking it. I am grateful to the first anonymous reader for emphasizing this point.

162. Scrolls are displayed, for example, in the hands of the imperial couple on the David Casket (late ninth or early tenth c.). The mosaic representation of the sons and daughters of Basil I in the lost Kainourgion Palace provides another example. The *Vita Basilii* (tenth c.) explains that the children held books and/or scrolls in order to demonstrate that they “had been initiated into holy writ and shared in divine wisdom”; see Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 198; for the Greek text, see “Vita Basilii,” in *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. Immanuel Bekker (Bonn, 1838), 333–34. Although Mango translates the words referring to the items the children hold as codices (*tomous*) and books (*biblos*), Dagron translates *tomous* as rolls and *biblos* as books; see Gilbert Dagron, “From the Mappa to the Akakia: Symbolic Drift,” in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, ed. Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 203–19, esp. 211. For discussion of the lack of clarity in terminology referring to codices, scrolls, and their constituent parts, see Basile Atsalos, *La terminologie du livre-manuscrit à l’époque byzantine: Première partie: Termes désignant le livre-manuscrit et l’écriture* (Thessalonike: Hetaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1971), 53–77, 150–61. For the long-standing tradition of using scrolls as symbols of education, see Elisabeth Alföldi-Rosenbaum, “Portrait Bust of a Young Lady of the Time of Justinian,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 1 (1968): 19–40.

163. See, for example, f. 7v of the Paris Psalter, illustrated in John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 206. Here, David is shown in the company of Wisdom and Prophecy: David holds an open book, Wisdom has a book tucked under her left arm, and Prophecy grasps a scroll in her left and points to the open page with her right hand. The open book in David’s hand states: “Give the king [*basileus*] thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto to the king’s son.” For a discussion of the Paris Psalter as an imperial luxury manuscript and David as a typological representation of the Byzantine emperor, see I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, “The Paris Psalter,” in *Eighth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference: Abstracts of Papers* October 15–17, 1982, Chicago (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1982), 50–51. Also see Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 163, 240–42.

164. Bissera Pentcheva, “Visual Textuality: The Logos as Pregnant Body

and Building,” in *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 45 (2004): 225–38, esp. 228–34; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 290–91.

165. Cotsonis, “Narrative Scenes on Byzantine Lead Seals,” 71–72, with further bibliography.

166. Henry Maguire, “The Heavenly Court,” 247–58, esp. 248–49, 258.

167. There are numerous such texts. See examples in Henry Maguire, *Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 92–93, where texts describe icons of the Virgin coming to life; for descriptions of the Virgin moving around the walls of Constantinople during a siege, see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 43; for an example of the Virgin appearing in her sanctuary at the Blachernai in Constantinople, see Nikephoros’s Life of St. Andrew the Fool, variously dated to the seventh or tenth centuries, Lennart Rydén, ed. and trans., *The Life of St. Andrew the Fool*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 4 (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1995), 254–55.

168. For the state cult of the Virgin, see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 27–35, 61–103.

169. Psellos, *Chronographie*, 1:102–3; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 138–39; Lynda Garland, “Street-life in Constantinople: Women and the Carnavalesque,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 163–76, esp. 165–67.

170. For the important role of women in grieving and lamenting the deceased, see Sharon E. J. Gerstel, “Painted Sources of Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 89–111, esp. 100–103. For the relative seclusion of women, see, for example, *ODB* 3:2201–4. For a discussion of the role of Byzantine women, see for example, Lynda Garland, “The Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women: A Further Note on Conventions of Behavior and Social Reality as Reflected in Eleventh and Twelfth Century Historical Sources,” *Byzantion* 58 (1988): 361–93.

171. For the prevalent use of antithesis or paradox in Byzantine thought and art, see Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, 53–83; *ODB* 1:123–24.

172. Alexander P. Kazhdan, “Women at Home,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 1–17; Herrin, “Imperial Feminine,” 28–29. Also see Angeliki E. Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31/1 (1981): 233–60 (reprinted in Angeliki E. Laiou, *Gender, Society and Economic Life in Byzantium*, Collected Studies series; CS370 [Aldershot: Variorum, 1992]), who stresses the role of mothers in the survival of the family (and by implication of the whole society) both



through procreation and the inalienable ownership of the dowry they bring to their family upon marriage, esp. 236-41.

173. See Zulian, "Reconstructing the Image of an Empress," 34-38; Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 35, 41. Although Hill, James, and Smythe emphasize the role of Zoe as "a ruler in her own right," it is clear from their analysis that despite the widely accepted perception that she was heir to the empire she exercised executive power only rarely and under exceptional circumstances, see Hill, James, and Smythe, "Zoe: The Rhythm Method of Imperial Renewal."

174. See J. B. Bury, "The Constitution of the Later Roman Empire," in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. Harold Temperley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 99-125, esp. 107-8. For the imperial office defined as male, see, for example, Hill, James, and Smythe, "Zoe: The Rhythm Method of Imperial Renewal," 217, 228; Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 55; Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 41. That the Byzantine ruler was normally a married male is shown by the fact that between 324 and 1453 there were only two adult rulers who did not marry: Basil II and his niece Theodora. Another exception was Irene, who ruled alone in 797-802; however, she was a widow. For a list of Byzantine emperors and their wives, see Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 229-31.

175. Quoted from the *Basilica* 2.6.1 in Bensammar, "La titulature de l'impératrice et sa signification," 272; Stojan Maslev, "Die staatrechtliche Stellung der byzantinischen Kaiserinnen," *Byzantinoslavica* 2 (1966): 308-43, esp. 309. Herrin emphasizes the important point that the role of the empress in Byzantium is defined only vaguely; see Herrin, "Imperial Feminine," 24, 35.

176. J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1911), 30-33, 124; Albert Vogt, *Le livre des cérémonies: Commentaire*, t. 2 (Paris: Belles lettres, 1940), 77. As an exception that strengthens the rule, see the case of Anna Dalassene, who was given full executive power by her son during his absence; Comnena, *Alexiad*, 115-18.

177. See *Theophanes Continuatus*, 78, lines 14-16; for English translation, see Alexander P. Kazhdan and Michael McCormick, "The Social World of the Byzantine Court," in Maguire, *Byzantine Court Culture*, 167-97, esp. 183. For a discussion of the role of empresses in the ceremonial life of the court, see *ibid.*, 182-85 and Herrin, "The Imperial Feminine," 18-23; Herrin, "Theophano: Considerations on the Education of a Byzantine Princess," in *The Empress Theophano: Byzantium and the West at the Turn of the First Millennium*, ed. Adelbert Davids (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

1995), 64-85, esp. 72-76.

178. See for example Judith Herrin's discussion of three empresses of the late eighth and the first half of the ninth centuries, two of whom served as regent mothers protecting the interests of their children (Irene and Theodora). Irene even ruled in her own right while the third empress (Euphrosyne) transmitted legitimacy to her husband following his seizure of power through her purple bloodline; Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers in Medieval Byzantium* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001). Also see her remarks in "Imperial Feminine," 18-23.

179. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 246-50, provides examples of the influence of Byzantine empresses on state affairs. Yet intercession was not a strong concept in the understanding of the role of empresses in Byzantium, contrary to the more prominent notion of the intercessory role of queens in the medieval West; also see Herrin, "Imperial Feminine," 31-34. For the intercessory role of Western queens, see, for example, Lois L. Huneycutt, "Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos," in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 126-46; John Carmi Parsons, "The Queen's Intercession in Thirteenth-Century England," *ibid.*, 147-77.

180. Dagron analyzed the inherent tension between the hereditary transmission of power and the ideology of election (by divine right) to the imperial office in Byzantium, see Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 13-53.

181. Psellos, *Chronographie* 1:117-124; Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 155-162.

182. See Robert S. Nelson, "To Say and To See: Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143-68, esp. 144.

183. I do not exclude the possibility that the empresses commissioned the work themselves.

184. F. 2v depicts the evangelist Matthew in the company of John Chrysostom, while f. 3r shows the three imperial figures in the lower half of the page and Christ enthroned flanked by two angels in the upper half of the page. The accompanying inscription of f. 3r addresses Christ directly while the text on f. 2v states that Matthew and John Chrysostom make requests on behalf of the imperial figures. See Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 99-100, fig. 66.

185. F. 1(2bis)r depicts the enthroned emperor in the presence of a monk;

f.2r shows the emperor with four courtiers and two female personifications (Truth and Justice); f. 1(2bis)v represents the double coronation of an imperial couple by Christ, see Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 107-12, figs. 69-72; Maguire, "The Heavenly Court," 249. The complicated history of the patronage of this manuscript suggests that the original patron was also the scribe of the manuscript, yet due to his fall from favor, the manuscript was appropriated by Monk Sabbas, who commissioned the representation on f. 1(2bis)r; see Carmen-Laura Dumitrescu, "Remarques en marge du Coislin 79: Les trois eunuques et le problème du donateur," *Byzantion* 57 (1987): 32-45; Durand, *Byzance*, 360-361.

186. Dumitrescu, "Remarques en marge du Coislin 79," 34.

187. For the education of Byzantine princesses, see Herrin, "Theophano: Considerations on the Education of a Byzantine Princess," 64-85.

188. While this analysis emphasizes the male-female gender binary, it is important to note that a third gender existed in Byzantium embodied by the beardless men, eunuchs, many of whom wielded significant power in the imperial administration. For eunuchs, see ODB 2:746-47; Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 160-69, 345-46. Herrin emphasizes the strong associations between eunuchs and empresses, *Women in Purple*, 17, 18, 107-13.

189. The praise of women through masculinization of character is a typical trope of Byzantine literature; for an analysis of this rhetorical device, see Halsall, *Women's Bodies, Men's Souls* 191-205.